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Literacy at a distance: language and learning in distance education

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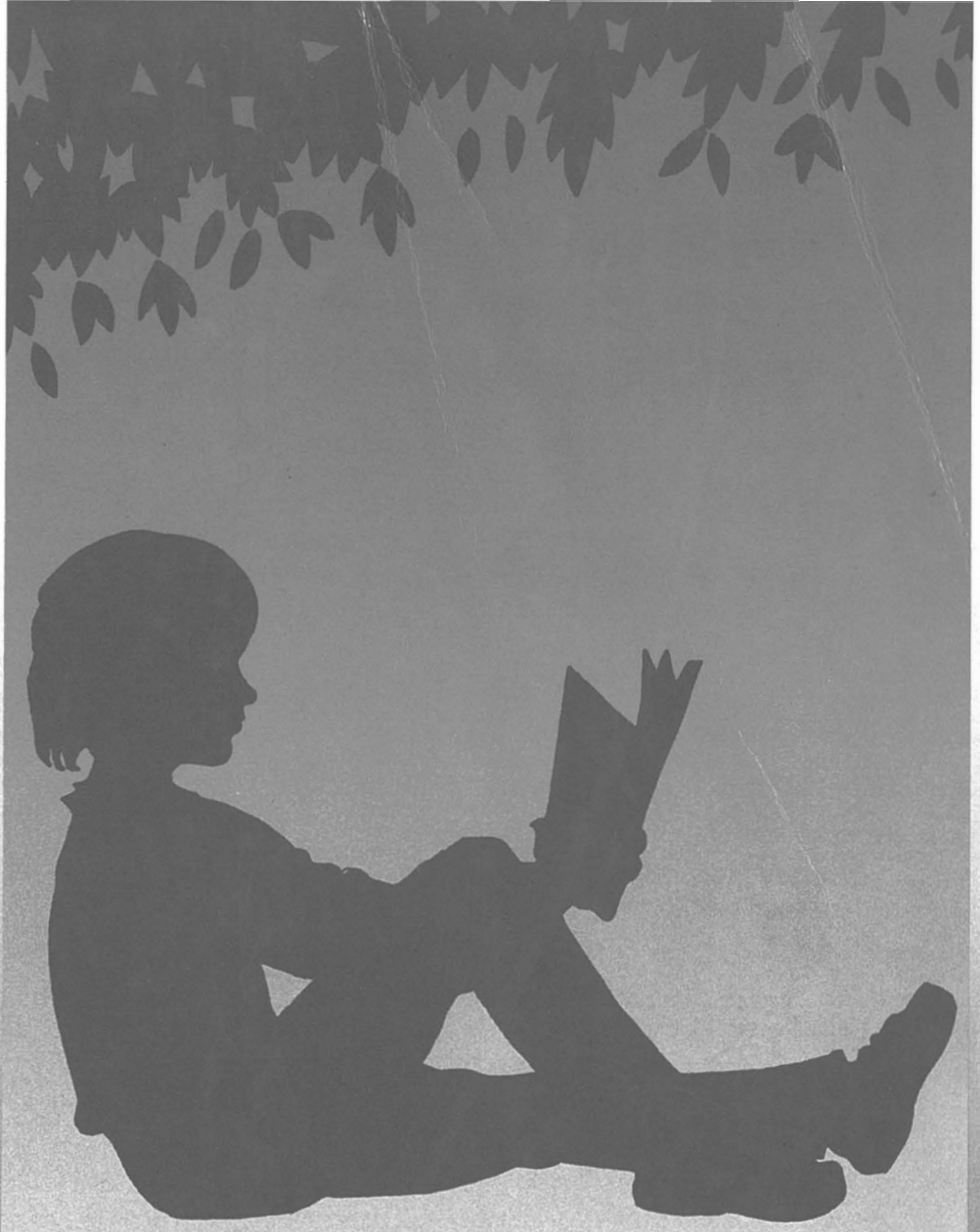

LITERACY AT A DISTANCE

WILLIAM LOUDEN AND JUDITH RIVALLAND

AUSTRALIAN Language & Literacy POLICY

DEET

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LANGUAGE AND LEARNING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

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Australian Language & Literacy Policy
National Child Literacy Project 5 1994-95

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We are especially grateful to Dr Amanda Blackmore and Mrs Helen House who provided invaluable research assistance on this project. Amanda Blackmore designed the literacy and learning survey and analysed the data. Helen House conducted a number of the case studies. She also organised our field work, managed the complexities of contact with schools and families, and managed the production of the final report. The project would not have been completed without her cheerful, energetic and independent contribution. Melissa White quickly and efficiently transcribed hundreds of hours of audio-tape.

Parents and teachers kindly gave permission for us to publish the case studies having read them, but our interpretations and deductions from these studies are not necessarily shared by them. Nor do views expressed in this Report necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training.

William Louden
Judith Rivalland

Perth, April 1995

A GUIDE TO THE READER

This report provides a descriptive account of the language and learning practices of distance education students in the middle years of their schooling. Data for the report include a language and learning survey and a set of fifteen narrative case studies which describe the literacy practices of students and their families.

The report is divided into two parts. Part 1 provides an overview of the interpretations the researchers have made from their data collection and analysis. Part 1 includes an Executive Summary and five chapters of interpretations. Chapter 1, *Overview*, provides a summary of the factors that support the language and literacy outcomes for students learning in isolation, a description of effective home and school practices, and a description of the features of effective materials and modes of delivery. Chapter 1 also suggests some guidelines for future development of language and literacy programs for students working in isolation. Chapters 2 to 5 are thematic chapters, exploring in more detail the issues summarised in Chapter 1. Chapter 2, *Family Literacy Practices*, describes the literacy and learning practices of families involved in distance education. Chapter 3, *Texts and Tasks*, describes the ways in which students used the printed materials which form the core of most students' experience of distance education. Chapter 4, *Technology*, provides an account of the use of technology by distance learners. Chapter 5, *Supervision*, describes students' timetables and patterns of supervision, and the feedback they received from teachers and home tutors.

Part 2 of the report provides an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collected in the study. Unlike the thematic analysis in Part 1, the chapters in Part 2 mostly deal with the particulars of individual language and learning contexts. Chapter 6 provides an analysis of the language and learning survey. Chapters 7 to 20 are narrative case studies of distance education families' language and learning practices.

The report is sequenced from the general to the specific. Readers whose first interest is in the implications of the study may wish to begin with the executive summary and then read a more extended summary of the implications in Chapter 1. Readers interested in a more detailed thematic analysis of the issues canvassed in Chapter 1 will find it in Chapters 2 to 5. Readers more interested in the relationship between individual distance learning contexts and students' learning, or the survey data, may wish to begin with the more detailed chapters in Part 2.

Pseudonyms have been given to all locations, students, teachers and family members named in this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study provides a description of the practices and strategies of distance learning for students in Years 6 to 10. It describes the materials and modes of delivery of distance education, and identifies three influences on achievement. A model for improvement is proposed, identifying ten prospective areas for improvement of distance education services.

Practices and Strategies of Distance Learning

The physical distance between teachers and learners shapes the practices and strategies of distance education in at least four important ways—relationships, patterns of organisation, the forms of support students receive, and patterns of assessment and feedback.

Materials and Modes of Delivery

The dominance of printed materials in distance education has led to the adoption by students of an unusual set of strategies for dealing with texts. The strategies include:

- skimming the text for tasks,
- deciding what is essential,
- going step by step,
- sticking to the facts,
- focusing on finishing, and
- calling for help.

In addition to text-based materials, five forms of technological support for distance learning were encountered in this study:

- telephone support,
- air lessons,
- computers,
- telematics, and
- interactive television.

Telephones were the most frequently used form of technology, and air lessons seemed to be the most effective. Considerable development work will be required before computers, telematics and interactive television are as effective as the current technology of air lessons. Telephones were most often used for organisation of learning, and not often used well to support teaching and learning.

Influences on Achievement

The study identified three kinds of influence on student achievement: family home background, students' textual strategies, and home tutor roles.

Most, but not all of the higher achieving students came from families whose literacy practices were similar to the middle class literacy practices that have typically been associated with higher chances of success in academic performance.

One of the textual strategies that distinguished some of the higher achieving students was careful reading, re-reading and underlining of the text, in order to be sure that the task was well understood. The second textual strategy characteristic of the higher achieving students was that they had a wider range of strategies available to deal with text that they did not understand.

Higher achieving students were all well supported by tutors or supervisors, although the forms of support varied. One student had a mentor relationship with a teacher at the Distance Education Centre. Another higher achieving secondary student was working in a primary school with the support of a paid tutor and two parents who were teachers. The three higher achieving primary students had home tutors who provided clear guidelines in the supervisor role, and had the knowledge and experience to act in the teacher role or were able to work alongside the student in a co-learner role.

A Model for Improvement

The study identifies ten prospective areas of action for improvement:

- learning support for home tutors,
- social support for students,
- self monitoring strategies,
- textual strategies,
- feedback,
- assessment,
- extension and remediation,
- telephones,
- computers, and
- integration of technology.

INTRODUCTION

This study is an exploration of language and learning practices in the context of distance education. More specifically it focuses on the distance education of children in the later years of primary school (Years 6 and 7) and the earlier years of secondary school (Years 8, 9 and 10). Most of the students involved in the study were enrolled in distance education in Western Australia. Some of the Year 6 and 7 students were enrolled in regional schools of the air. Other Year 6 and 7 students and all of the Year 8, 9 and 10 students were enrolled in the Distance Education Centre in Perth. The project brief identified four aims for the research:

- determine the factors that influence achievement of language and literacy outcomes for students learning in isolation;
- identify effective practices and strategies within the school and home for the improvement of language and literacy outcomes for students learning in the distance education mode;
- identify the features of distance education materials and modes of delivery which will enhance the language and learning of students; and
- develop a model for improvement of language and literacy outcomes for students learning through a distance education mode which features the criteria and principles for curriculum development

This study combined both qualitative and quantitative data sources, in an attempt to build on the strengths of both methods. The quantitative data were collected using a whole-population survey of families with children enrolled in upper primary or lower secondary courses in Western Australia's Distance Education Centre and the Schools of the Air. The survey was supplemented by fifteen case studies of families selected to reflect the range of location, reason for enrolment in distance education, pattern of distance education, school performance, gender and year of schooling. The case studies provide the core data of the study. They stand alone as accounts of contexts and learning practices of individual families, and function together as representatives of key categories of distance education circumstances.

Through the case studies and survey, the project collected a broad range of data on home and school practices in the area of literacy, including:

- family literacy practices;
- home tutor- student interactions;
- students' use of curriculum materials; and
- teacher- student interactions: by telephone, correspondence, telematics and air lessons.

The qualitative data collected through the case studies was compared with the quantitative data collected through the survey, and cross-analysed with student outcome data provided by the distance education schools in Western Australia.

Quantitative Data

Distance education serves a wide range of students who have many different reasons for their enrolment. In this study, the students were grouped into five categories which represent the range of enrolment types. The first category, *country*, consisted of country children who depended on distance education because they lived too far away from regular schools. The second category, *overseas*, consisted of children who were living overseas and whose parents or guardians preferred them to continue with an Australian school curriculum. The third category, *traveller*, consisted of children of itinerant families. Some of these families followed itinerant rural occupations such as prospecting or shearing, and others were travelling on extended holidays. The fourth category, called *referral*, consisted of students who had been referred to distance education because there were medical or social reasons why they could not enrol in regular schools. *Adults*, the final group consisted of adults who were taking Year 10 subjects by distance education. Table 1 shows the number of students in each category, for whom the schools had reliable current postal addresses, and the response rates from students in each category.

Table 1

Response rates in each category

Category	Number distributed	Number (%) of valid returns
Country	148	63 (43)
Overseas	72	23 (32)
Traveller	49	18 (36)
Referral	100	31 (31)
Adult	53	21 (40)
Total	422	156 (37)

The largest group of respondents was in the country category of the survey, students who were enrolled in distance education because of the geographical remoteness of their permanent home in WA. Compared with the other groups of students enrolled in distance education in WA, the opinions of students and adults in the country category are probably over-represented in the survey data. There are four reasons why the survey over-represents the opinions of students and parents in the country category. They were the largest of the five categories: 35% of the survey forms (148 of the 422 distributed) went to students in the country category. Secondly, this group was responsible for the highest proportion of valid returns (43% returned). Thirdly, the proportion of country students who were posted and who probably received forms was also

higher than other categories. During the mailing process, a number of students who were formally enrolled in distance education were excluded from mailing because they were no longer active students, or because their location was not known. These students were mostly from the "traveller"' and "referral" groups of students. Finally, the availability of school grades required that the correlational part of the quantitative study only included students in the country and overseas categories. Of the 86 students in these two categories, grades were available for 69 students. Grades were available for much smaller numbers of students in the traveller, referral and adult categories (ranging from 2 to 11 students in these categories).

Qualitative Study

On the advice of the project advisory committee, case study families were chosen to fill a grid representing the range of districts, categories of students, distance education patterns, school performance, gender and school year. Table 2 shows the names of the students eventually selected with the assistance of the cooperating schools.

Table 2
Case Study Participants

Case	Name	Year	Category	Education pattern
1	Owen Abrahams	Year 8	Referral	School /materials-based
2	Emily Baker	Year 6	Country	Home /school of the air
3	Justin Beard	Year 9	Country	School /materials-based
4	Peta Cameron	Year 6	Country	Home /materials-based
5	James Camisa	Year 9	Country	Home /materials-based
6	David Cooke	Year 10	Referral	Home /materials-based
7	Chris Daniels	Year 8	Traveller	Home /materials-based
8	Sophie Dansie	Year 7	Country	Home /school of the air
9	William Douglas	Year 7	Country	Home /materials-based
10	Shaun Jacobs	Year 6	Country	Home /materials-based
11	Greg Jacobs	Year 8	Country	Home /materials-based
12	Daphne Jekich	Year 10	Referral	Home /materials-based
13	Stephanie Kelly	Year 7	Country	Home /school of the air
14	Troy Proctor	Year 10	Country	Home /materials-based
15	Miranda Rourke	Year 7	Country	Home / school of the air

In order to avoid identifying the families, two of the selection criteria are not included in the table: the actual districts, and teachers' school performance

rating of the students. The districts in which students lived were chosen to represent the range of farming and pastoral circumstances of distance education families, and the individual students were chosen to ensure that the whole group represented the full range of academic ability. There were fifteen case study students, drawn from fourteen families. Some of the case studies also report data on siblings who were working on distance education alongside case study students.

Four of the primary students were studying through a regional school of the air, and three primary students were studying at home with distance education materials. Two of the secondary students were working with distance education materials in space made available in a local primary school, four were working with distance education materials in their family's permanent home, one was working with distance education materials as his family travelled around Australia in a caravan, and another student was working with distance education materials in a prospector's camp.

Eight of the students lived on pastoral stations, three lived in remote farming or mining districts, three were not enrolled in regular schools for medical or social reasons, although they geographical access to regular schools in the location in which they lived, and one student was itinerant.

Five students were rated by their teachers as above average performers in language and literacy, six were rated as average performers, and four were rated as below average performers. Eight students were female and seven were male. Lower performers were slightly over-represented among the primary students; girls were over-represented among the primary students. Three students were in Year 6, four in Year 7, three in Year 8, three in Year 9 and two in Year 10.

Compared with the total enrolments in distance education, country students were over-represented in the case studies: eleven country students compared with three referrals, one traveller, no overseas students and no adults. In part, he decision to over-represent country students reflected the relative complexity of the distance education patterns available to remote country children: school of the air for primary-aged children, space in a local primary school for secondary-aged children, or distance education predominantly by post and printed materials for both primary and secondary children. It also reflected difficulties in making contact with families in some of the other categories. Considerations of cost led us to exclude overseas families from the case studies. Travellers were difficult to locate for the series of conversations about participation and ethical approval, as well as the unpredictability of their movements when the time came for the case study visit. One traveller was located, by the unusual method of knocking on doors in a caravan park on the round-Australia caravan route. One additional referral student (a teen-age mother) was selected and agreed to participate in the study, but proved difficult to contact during the data collection phase. No adult distance education students were included in the case studies, as the study was directed at children's literacy.

The ethnic and language background of students in this study was narrower than the range of participants in our previous case studies of home and school literacy practices in regular schools (Breen, Louden, Rivalland, Rohl, Rhydwen and Lloyd, 1994). We included one Aboriginal student and one student from a non-English speaking background. Both of these students were in the referral group, which reflected the predominantly Anglo-Celtic background of rural users of distance education in Western Australia.

A Note On The Case Studies

The case studies are narrative accounts of the data collected by three researchers during field work visits which spanned the length and breadth of Western Australia and beyond. Four kinds of data were collected:

- audio-taped, semi-structured interviews with home-tutors and students;
- audio-taped recordings of students as they completed their school work in a range of contexts including lessons in pastoral station school rooms, school camps, visits to the Distance Education Centre, and school of the air "air lessons";
- audio diaries collected by students in the period after home visits; and
- written field notes made by the researchers on the basis of their observations of students' distance learning.

Verbatim transcriptions of the interviews, school work sessions and audio diaries were prepared and stored as computer files, along with the written field notes. Drawing on these four data sources, narrative accounts of each family's language and learning practices were prepared. The case studies appear in Part 2 of this report.

The narratives contain significant sections of material directly quoted from the participants. Although the verbatim transcripts are faithful accounts of what happened, edited occasionally to remove the hesitations and repetitions of oral language, they are not themselves "facts". The transcripts and quotations that appear in the text are representations: shaped by a set of conventions of transcription, selected from the much larger set of transcript material available for each case, and arranged according to the emerging understanding of the events and opinions constructed by the writers of each case study. Although the narratives were constructed by the researchers and remain the responsibility of each of the authors, we have chosen to describe the experience of each family as far as possible in their own words. Copies of the case studies were returned to the participants for comment.

Because the interest of the study was descriptive and the transcripts were intended to be the core of narrative case studies, the transcripts have not been marked according to linguistic or ethno-methodological conventions.

PART 1

CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW

This chapter provides an overview and summary of the study. The first section provides a summary of the practices and strategies of distance learning for students in the upper primary and lower secondary years of school. The second section summarises the features of the curriculum materials and modes of delivery encountered in the case study research. The third section provides a summary of the factors that seem to influence achievement of distance education students in the middle years of schooling. The fourth and final section of the chapter offers some suggestions for continuing improvement of distance education.

Practices and Strategies of Distance Learning

The physical distance between teachers and learners shapes the practices and strategies of distance education in at least four important ways. The distance affects relationships, patterns of organisation, forms of support students receive, and patterns of assessment and feedback. An extended account of these issues may be found in Chapter 5, *Supervision*.

Relationships

One of the most striking differences between distance education and regular schooling is the different relationships between learners and the adults who help them learn. In schools, the relationships between teachers and students are often formal and rather custodial. Many teachers closely regulate what students may do with their time, when and how they speak, where they will move, and how they will complete the tasks assigned to them. Among the students involved in the case studies, there was a much wider range of relationships than would be found in most schools, and much more varied and informal patterns of control over their behaviour.

For many secondary students in the study, the difference in the relationships was the crucial advantage of studying at a distance from the school. Distance education offered these students opportunities to develop more personal learning relationships with their tutors and teachers than they had been able to develop in the context of regular schooling. For several of these students, distance education had very positive outcomes for their learning. In addition, distance education played essential social roles, preventing children from becoming "casualties" in the juvenile justice system or "pushing a pram" at 14, in the words of case study participants. In addition, several home tutors argued that distance education had allowed them to improve their relationships with their children.

Whether or not parents regarded distance education as improving their relationships with their children, it required a huge commitment from parents

and others involved in supporting the student. In all but two cases, family members or a governess living with the family provided support in the home tutor role. One student who did not have family support, a student in the referral category, found the support she needed from her co-ordinator at the Distance Education Centre. Another was supported by a local police officer. Although some home tutors enjoyed the role and regarded it as a very satisfying experience, some found it difficult to ration their time between the school room and their other duties. As one home tutor said, she would prefer to be "a normal mum, sending the kids off to school."

Home Tutor Roles

The skills of home tutors have long been regarded as pivotal in the success of distance education for school-aged students. In some case studies, home tutors seemed to have many different ways of helping their students; in other cases, just one or two ways of helping seemed to be well developed. Five overlapping home tutor roles were identified from the case study data:

- supervisor,
- teacher,
- mentor,
- co-learner, and
- parent.

Home tutors working in the *supervisor* role focused on completion of the task. Home tutors in the *teacher* role confidently assumed that they knew what the student ought to learn from the text. In the *mentor* role, home tutors focused on keeping the learning relationship between themselves and the student alive. Home tutors in the *co-learner* role, in contrast, immersed themselves in the learning problems faced by the student. In the *parent* role, home tutors combined their existing role as a member of the family with their distance education role as a home tutor.

Organisation

Unlike the moment-by-moment adult supervision that characterises learning in schools, many distance education students work unsupervised for much of their time. Estimates from the survey data varied between the adult and child form of the survey, but the children's survey indicated that about *half* of the students were unsupervised "most of the time or always." Students in the country and overseas categories said that they spent more time on school work each day than students in the traveller and referral categories. In the case studies, secondary students tended to start later and work longer than primary students. Most of the primary students were located on pastoral stations, and tended to start work early and finish by lunch-time. Primary students received much closer supervision than secondary students. Some Year 6 and 7 students worked independently and set their own daily time-tables, as did some Year 8, 9 and 10 students. Among both primary and secondary students, there was a complete range from working under close home tutor supervision to working almost entirely without home tutor involvement. Secondary aged students,

almost all of whom had completed primary education in a regular school, found learning to organise their work one of the most difficult aspects of transition from regular schooling to distance education. The most successful secondary students had developed very strong self-monitoring learning strategies.

Assessment and Feedback

The relatively limited availability of feedback from teachers was identified by many of the home tutors and students as a problem they faced in supervision. The long delay between students' submission of a set and the arrival back of marked work meant that many students paid little attention to the teachers' comments when they arrived. More often, students were interested in the stickers and awards that accompanied returned work. Some of the older and more committed students carefully considered teachers' feedback, but this was relatively rare.

Two assessment issues were also highlighted by the research. One issue was the difficulty for teachers of making normative judgements based on the set work submitted by students. Approximately 80% of the students in the survey reported that they had an adult check their work before it was submitted. One home tutor noted that a child's "set work comes out fine" even though she knew the child "really [did] have problems". This difficulty in establishing normative standards was aggravated by teachers' limited use of marks, grades and standards, especially with primary students. Several home tutors noted that teachers gave indirect answers to hard questions about comparative standards. The one school of the air parent who had experience of feedback based on state-wide testing had at first been reluctant, but was now in favour of standardised testing. Teachers dealing with isolated students are in a double bind, of course, especially with students whose performance is relatively poor or whose home tutors are inexperienced. Providing feedback about standards is an essential part of teaching, but isolated and inexperienced home tutors prefer to receive encouragement and are likely to regard students' poor performance as a direct reflection on their teaching.

Materials and Modes of Delivery

Close attention has been paid in this study to the ways in which case study students worked with their text-based materials, and to the role of technology in supplementing the print-and-post based distance learning texts. One of the most striking characteristics of the distance learning we observed was the set of textual strategies students used in dealing with their distance education materials. An extended account of the use of materials can be found in Chapter 3, *Texts and Tasks*. An extended account of modes of delivery can be found in Chapter 4, *Technology*.

Materials

The five most common textual strategies students used to deal with their written materials were:

- skimming the text for tasks,
- deciding what is essential,
- going step by step,
- sticking to the facts,
- focusing on finishing, and
- calling for help.

Many of the students read their texts very quickly, and in a very instrumental way. The key reading strategy was *skimming the text for tasks*. Many students read the text only once, ignored supporting or exemplary material, and quickly settled on the task that had to be completed. Often this strategy meant that that they did not complete the task that had actually been asked, or that they did not have a sufficiently strong grasp of the text to complete the task. The second textual strategy was *deciding what is essential*. Students omitted material that was optional, and completed tasks that were to be assessed. The third strategy was to *focus on finishing*. Unlike regular schools, distance education students' work is neatly broken into 10-day sections and they have a very clear idea of what has to be done. The satisfaction of "getting everything over and done with" was reported by many students, including the most successful students. Students also expressed a preference for materials that would allow them to follow the strategy of *going step by step*. They preferred materials that were well set out and broke the materials up into predictable and manageable parts. Their reading practices tended to turn even resolutely non-linear texts into a series of steps to be completed. Distance education students' practical approach to getting through the work was accompanied by a preference for *sticking to the facts*. Students preferred short answer questions, preferred not to have to give an opinion, and were reluctant to engage in interpretation. More successful students were less likely to fit this profile, but were still reluctant to critique the text or accept that a text may not be correct. The final textual strategy was *getting help* when the text was not easy to understand. All of the students had occasions to seek outside help to understand aspects of the text they were working with. Their strategies ranged from very dependent responses to texts, such as asking for help immediately they did not understand, to independent responses from others who had learned to re-read the text, to "read between the lines", and to save the difficult text until a home tutor was available. One of the characteristics of the more successful students was that they had a range of strategies available to deal with text that they could not understand.

Most home tutors and students had an uncritical attitude towards the distance education texts that were provided for them, and showed little sense that the texts themselves might vary in quality. Among the few criticisms voiced by more than one home tutor were comments about the labour-intensiveness of the junior primary language materials, and the limited and mainly narrative writing in the senior primary materials. One home tutor, a trained teacher, regretted that she couldn't see the "thinking behind" some of the work and would have preferred materials that allowed for more individual differences. One able student felt that the materials would "touch on an issue" and then move on too quickly. He also complained about the conceptual level of some

of the work and the lack of availability of extension work. One home tutor expressed concerns about the conceptual level, and regarded some of the materials as insulting to Aboriginal people.

Modes of Delivery

Five forms of technological support for distance learning were encountered during the qualitative data collection for this study:

- telephone support,
- air lessons,
- computers,
- telematics, and
- interactive television.

Of these five forms, the most frequently encountered were the use of telephones and air lessons. The air lessons were universally regarded as useful, even thought there were problems with poor radio reception from time to time. Air lessons supported print-based distance learning in a variety of ways. They increased the already high levels of students' explicit understanding of the teaching and learning program, provided opportunities for students to rehearse their answers to teachers' questions, provided a social context for physically isolated students' learning, connected the learning with individual student's lives, and supported students to complete their written set work.

In contrast with air lessons, the evidence about telephone use was much more ambiguous. Telephones were the most frequently used form of technology, proving especially useful in supporting the organisation of distance learning. The survey data suggested that telephone calls to teachers were used as a last resort when students confronted learning difficulties. As the case studies made clear, this was not universally so. Some families made very frequent use of the telephone for both learning and organisational assistance. However, the phone calls to teachers that we recorded were more successful in solving organisational problems than learning problems.

Computers were widely used in this study: 40% of students responding to the survey had the use of a computer, as did 60% of the case study students. Computers had been implemented very successfully in some contexts, allowing for speedy submission of work by modem, but the use of computers was plainly in its infancy compared with the use of telephones and air lessons. Use of computers tended to reproduce the same text forms as the written texts students were using, and were made less effective than they might have been by inexperience, by patterns of power availability on pastoral stations, and by incomplete sets of equipment.

The use of telematics and interactional television was also in its infancy, prone to technical failure, and incompletely integrated into written set work. The more thoroughly new technology is integrated into set work, as air lessons are in schools of the air, the more likely it is to be valued and used by home tutors.

New technology will no doubt improve distance education as it is more widely introduced, but there seems to be a long and steep learning curve. Some home tutors remain sceptical about technology, arguing that "money into technology is not necessarily the answer" and that "technology is great, if it works." In the mean time, it seems likely that more educational use could be made of the humble and widely available telephone.

Influences on Achievement

The study identified three kinds of influence on student achievement: family home background, students' textual strategies, and home tutor roles.

Family Background

As might reasonably have been expected, family background was an important, but not crucial, factor in predicting students' success. According to the survey data analysis (see Chapter 6, *Language and Learning*), the factors predicting students' English grades were all directly related to practices with books. These factors included the frequency with which students read books; whether their home supervisor read aloud with any of the children in the household; whether their home supervisor discussed things that he or she had been reading with any of the children in the household; and the number of ways in which their home supervisor interacted with any of the children in regard to reading and writing.

A full analysis of the influence of family background on achievement may be found in Chapter 2, *Family Literacy Practices*. The case study data supports the survey conclusions of factors predicting success, and several other characteristics that have previously been reported in the literature. Five of the fifteen students in the case studies were identified by their teachers as "higher achievers". Most of these higher achievers came from families whose literacy practices were similar to the middle class literacy practices that have typically been associated with higher chances of success in academic performance.

Among the five higher achieving students, four were keen recreational readers, although only one of the five came from a family where the parents were recreational readers. All four of the higher achievers who were geographically isolated made extensive use of libraries, even though they were required to order the books from school or public libraries and wait for them to arrive by mail. Four of the five higher achievers came from families where parents wrote letters or diaries, or read and wrote at home in connection with their professional lives. Four of the five had a range of significant conversations with parents about reading and writing, either in connection with their distance learning or in addition to their school work. Four of the five higher achievers had many books at home. Two of the higher achievers came from families where one or more parents had a university degree, two came from families where parents had left school around the school leaving age and before completing high school. One student came from a family where both parents had very limited literacy skills in English.

Textual Strategies

The five higher achieving students shared some, but not all, of the common textual strategies observed in the case studies and described briefly above. (See Chapter 5, *Texts and Tasks*, for an extended account.) Most students, including all of the higher achieving students *worked step by step, focussed on finishing* and preferred to *stick to the facts*. Some of them also *skimmed the text for tasks*, but this was not universally the case. One of the textual strategies that distinguished some of the higher achieving students was careful reading, re-reading and underlining of the text, in order to be sure that the task was well understood. The second textual strategy characteristic of the higher achieving students was that they had a wider range of strategies available to deal with text that they did not understand. Some of the weaker students would simply miss out work they could not understand, or would ask for help with re-reading the text. In contrast, the higher achieving students would re-read the text to see if they had missed something, come back to the difficult section when their home tutor was available to help, or (in only one case) telephone the distance education teacher.

Home Tutor Roles

For some of the students, especially those who had poor experiences with regular schooling, the generally non-custodial relationships with home tutors enabled them to experience more success than they had in regular schools. In some cases the improvements appeared to be modest, and in some cases the improvements were spectacular. Two of the three students in the referral category were supported by someone other than a parent, and in both of these cases the adult served as a mentor to the student. Some home tutors worked in very restricted roles, preferring to limit themselves to supervising that the sets were completed and leaving most of the teaching and marking to the teachers. Among the higher achieving secondary students, one had no home tutor, but had a mentor relationship with a teacher at the Distance Education Centre. Another higher achieving secondary student was working in a primary school with the support of a paid tutor and two parents who were teachers. The three higher achieving primary students had home tutors who provided clear guidelines in the supervisor role, had the knowledge and experience to act in the teacher role or were able to work alongside the student in a co-learner role, and who brought the intimate knowledge of a parent to the learning relationship.

A Model for Improvement

It is important to note that this study is not an evaluation of the Western Australian distance education system. For reasons of convenience, data was collected mainly in Western Australia, but it could have been collected in any state or territory. The focus of the data collection was language and learning practices of families involved in distance education, not on the actions of particular teachers or policies of particular institutions. We attempted to collect comprehensive quantitative data on language and learning practices through a survey of parents and students, and comprehensive qualitative data through

case studies of families. No comprehensive data was collected on teachers' practices, or on curriculum materials and technology, other than the materials and technology we found in use in the case studies.

We believe that the conclusions of the study, and the recommendations it has to make about improvements are, however, soundly based in the data we collected about language and learning practices in families. We have identified 10 prospective areas of action for improvement:

- learning support for home tutors,
- social support for students,
- self monitoring strategies,
- textual strategies,
- feedback,
- assessment,
- extension and remediation,
- telephones,
- computers, and
- integration of technology.

Learning Support for Home Tutors

More assistance should be provided for home tutors to move beyond the limited role of supervising their student to get their sets completed in time. Most of the higher achieving students had home tutors who provided much more than supervision. Home tutor support need not require superior knowledge, as several successful home tutors with limited formal education demonstrated. The key role to be developed is the role of the co-learner. That is, home tutors who want to ensure that their students make the most of their distance learning ought ensure that they are available to assist their student to work out what the distance learning text means, when students are confused.

Social Support for Students

Technological means of increasing social support for isolated students should be explored. The most successful current technological medium is air lessons provided by the schools of the air. Air lessons play an important role in reducing isolation and increasing structure for students. Prospectively, daily E-mail to students could fill the same social and organisational roles, as well as proving instantaneous learning assistance.

Self Monitoring Strategies

More support should be provided for students to develop self-monitoring strategies. Many students had learned to complete their sets independently, but few had learned to monitor independently their own learning. New students reported that the most difficult aspect of transition from regular schools to distance education was to learn to be organised and take responsibility for their own work. Among secondary students, most of whom attended regular primary schools, this was a particular problem. Successful

students overcame this problem, but among the weaker secondary students were several students who suffered the double disadvantage of poor literacy skills and a dependent approach to learning.

Textual Strategies

Students' should be supported to increase their range of textual strategies. Distance education students' considerable experience in using text-based materials makes them very effective readers, if effectiveness is measured by the capacity to locate and act on the essential aspects of texts. However, it would also be helpful if students received more support in learning to read more slowly and methodically, and to pay more attention to the illustrative and supporting material which also forms part of the texts they use.

In addition, it would be helpful if students learned to use a wider range of strategies for seeking assistance when they strike difficulty in understanding a printed text. Higher achieving students had a wider range of strategies for getting help.

Feedback

Patterns of feedback to students should be reconsidered, especially in the primary years. Stickers and awards no doubt motivate students, but they do not provide any information to the student about performance. The evidence is that few students currently read the written feedback. Those few who do read the feedback are among the higher achieving group.

More timely feedback should also be provided to students. In the short term, more active use of the telephone may be a good strategy; in the longer term, daily communication by E-mail and modem seems more promising.

Assessment

Distance education providers should consider increasing the use of normative assessment. Parents are concerned about how well their children are performing, and deserve more information than parents of primary-aged students seemed to receive. It may be necessary for primary school teachers to overcome existing norms about giving solely positive feedback, and for them to overcome the difficulty of giving unpopular news to isolated and inexperienced home tutors.

Extension and Remediation

Revisions of printed materials should include attention to remediation and extension. Several of the more academically successful students and one of the professionally trained home tutors complained about the lack of extension materials for students. Although distance learning materials are expensive to produce, it would be helpful if the sets of work provided more explicitly for both extension and remediation.

Telephones

The use of telephones should be reconsidered. The evidence of the study is that telephones are used by students mainly on organisation issues. As a means of solving learning problems, they are used as a last resort. In one case where detailed data was available on the content of telephone calls to school, one organisational phone call was successful and two calls about substantive educational issues left the student dissatisfied.

Computers

The use of computers should continue to be developed. Many students already have computers, but make less than maximum use of computers because pastoral stations' patterns of power supply are not synchronised with school hours. Some schools of the air were experimenting with the use of solar power for computers, and should be encouraged to continue their experiments.

Integration of technology

As new forms of technology are introduced, they should be integrated into the printed sets. Although an increasingly wide range of technology is available to supplement printed materials, the evidence is that home tutors' desire to assist their students to complete and submit sets leads then to under-use resources that are not integrated into sets. This includes interactive television, computers, and videos.

CHAPTER 2
FAMILY LITERACY PRACTICES

The international literature on school performance has demonstrated consistent and predictable relationships between students' school success and their home backgrounds. In general, middle class students receive higher scores than working class students, urban students receive higher scores than rural students, students from English-speaking backgrounds receive higher scores than students from non-English speaking backgrounds when the language of instruction is English, and boys receive higher scores than girls in mathematics and physical science subjects. (Education Department of Western Australia, 1993; Elley, 1992; McGaw, 1989; Robitaille & Garden, 1989). Among these patterns of variability, social class is by far the most powerful predictor of student performance, often cancelling out gender, language or rural disadvantages (Walberg & Tsai, 1985; Education Department of Western Australia, 1995).

Several kinds of explanation have been advanced to account for this widely reported phenomenon. One possibility is that there are differences among the schools and teachers that serve different social class groups. When occupational status is held constant, students who go to schools in middle class Australian suburbs receive higher grades than students who go to schools in working class suburbs in the same city (Teese, McLean & Poelesel, 1994). Differences among schools may, in turn, be attributed to cultural content that favours middle class students (Auerbach, 1989; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), patterns of language use by teachers (Gee, 1990) or by the constructions of what counts as literacy in schools (Lankshear & Lawler, 1987). A second set of possibilities emphasises cultural differences in family home background, supported by the observation that "the cumulative effect of a range of home-related factors probably accounts for the greatest proportion of variability in student achievement" (Cairney, 1994, p. 264). Many scholars studying home factors have drawn attention to differences in literacy practices of particular social groups (Chall & Snow, 1982; Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981). Summarising this strand of the literature, Auerbach (1989) has argued that "children whose home literacy practices most closely resemble school literacy practices are more successful in school" (p. 167). Another, related, strand of research has considered the relationship between parental involvement and school performance. In a review of this literature, Morrow & Paratore (1993) concluded that "practices such as shared reading, reading aloud, making a variety of print materials available, and promoting positive attitudes toward literacy have been found to have a significant impact on children's literacy learning" (1993, p. 194).

Whether the emphasis is placed on home or school factors, it is clear that a mismatch between family home background and the literacy and learning assumptions of schools is at the heart of the patterns of inequality that have been so widely observed. Distance education provides an unusual set of

circumstances in which to explore the gap between home and school literacy. In distance education of children, the cultural gap between home and school is accompanied by a physical gap between home and school. In some ways the gap is larger—distance education is characterised by the physical separation of the student from the school—and in some ways it is smaller. Distance education students often work at home, and they are often supervised by parents who are much more intimately involved in their children's education than parents in regular schools.

For this reason, this study collected both qualitative and quantitative data on family literacy practices of distance education students. This chapter summarises the data on family literacy practices under the headings of parents' interactions with children, reading, writing, television and computers. In the final section of the chapter, family literacy practices are compared with students' school performance in English.

Parent Interactions With Children

Information on parent's literacy-related interaction with children was collected through the survey and the case studies. In the survey, respondents were asked to indicate which of a variety of activities they had done with any of their children in the previous week. Table 3 shows the numbers and percentages of respondents in each category who indicated that they had done these activities.

Table 3

Activities done in the last week by respondents

Activity	N (%)
Talked to one of your children about something s/he has been reading	111 (84.7)
Discussed something that you have watched on television or video	100 (76.3)
Told one of your children to go to a book to find the answer to a question s/he has asked	98 (74.8)
Talked to one of your children about something you have been reading	85 (64.9)
Read aloud together	69 (52.7)
Did any writing together	65 (49.6)
Discussed something that you have heard on the radio	57 (43.5)
Consulted a book together to find out how to do something around the house or property	44 (33.6)
Played games on a computer together	32 (24.4)

Most adults reported that they had directed one of their children to a book to answer a question, discussed with one of their children something he or she had been reading and something the adult had been reading, and discussed something on television or video.

Among the case study families there was a broad range of responses to the same question. In some families, such as Sophie Dansie's family (Case Study 8), parents initiated as many literacy activities as were reported in the survey data. In the week before we visited Sophie, for example, her mother had asked her to consult a reference book to answer a question Sophie had asked, talked to Sophie about the connections between something in a distance education set and her own magazine reading, helped Sophie look up an encyclopaedia, discussed topical issues from television news broadcasts, and played computer games with her.

In other family contexts, there were far fewer family interactions around reading and viewing. For example, in the week before the case study data were collected in Case Study 15, Mrs Rourke had asked one of her daughters to consult a dictionary and they looked at an atlas together, but she did not remember any recent occasions when they had read aloud together or discussed something one of the girls had been reading. Nor did she remember occasions when she had discussed her own reading with the girls. Conversations about television programs were more likely, she thought. In the week or two before the data were collected, for example, she remembered one of the girls talking to her about "those people that are dying in Rwanda".

Reading

Students were asked to indicate how often they read books, newspapers and magazines, and how often they wrote (outside of school work). About 40% of all respondents read books every day, with little variation from this figure among the categories. Overall, 4% indicated that they never read books. Magazines and newspapers were read every day by 34% of the total sample, and 16% reported that they did some writing every day, apart from school work. Like the distance education students, home tutors were asked about their practices with print and other media. The percentages of adults who read books every day are shown in Figure 1. Overall, slightly less than half (46%) of the adults reported reading books every day. These results from the literacy and learning survey provide a higher estimate of book reading than the case studies.

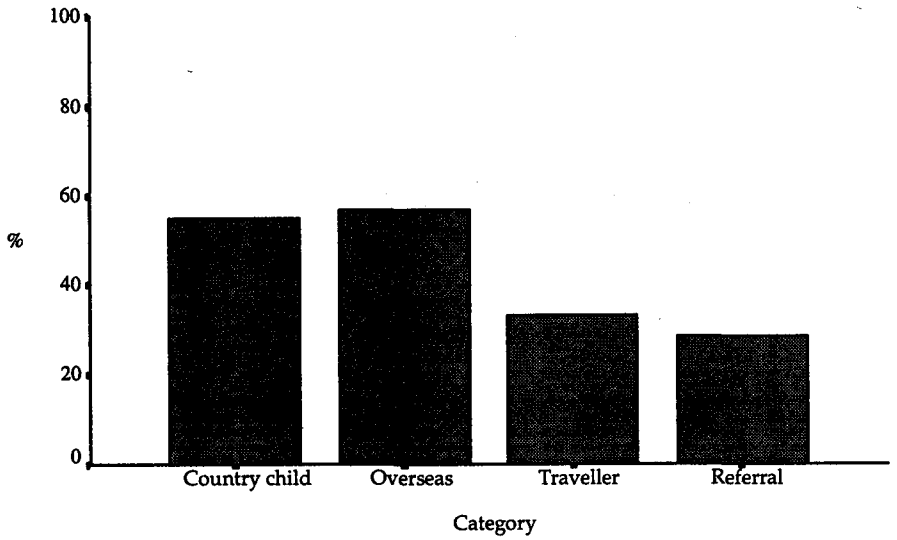

Figure 1. **Percentage of adult respondents in each category who read books every day**

Lower proportions of reading were reported in the fourteen case study families than in the survey. Only four home tutors identified themselves as frequent readers of books. Mrs Cooke (Case Study 6), Mrs Daniels (Case Study 7) and Mrs Kelly (Case Study 13) all described themselves as keen readers of mystery or adventure novels. The Proctor family (Case Study 14) read a great deal in connection with their religious beliefs. The whole family read and discussed four chapters of the Bible each week, as well as reading and discussing of religious periodicals.

More commonly, home tutors said that they did not have time to read novels (Case Study 10 & 11), had "got out of the habit of reading" (Case Study 3), had not read a book "since I left school" (Case Study 4), or did not have time to read novels (Case Study 5 & 9). A few home tutors indicated that they would read more often in the summer time when it was too hot to work in the afternoons (Case Study 15) or at holiday times (Case Study 8).

There was also a wide range of responses to the survey question which asked when students had last visited a library: 27% indicating that they had visited a library in the past two weeks; 27% that they had visited a library 2 weeks to 3 months ago; 26% that they had visited a library 3 to 12 months ago; and 20% not within the past 12 months. There was no evidence that children with more books were either more or less likely to have visited a library recently. The least recent library visits were made by overseas students. A similar range of library use was evident in the case studies.

About half of the case study families made regular use of public libraries for recreational reading. David Cooke (Case Study 6), who lived in the city, got many of his books from the local public library. Chris Daniels (Case Study 7) shared the mystery novels his mother borrowed from the public library, and often visited the public library to do research for social studies. The Kelly family (Case Study 13) borrowed books from the public library when they were in town. William Douglas (Case Study 9) visited the public library when

he was in town, but he mainly ordered his books from the distance education library because it was too difficult to return books to the public library. Justin Beard (Case Study 3) had books sent out from the nearest public library by the mail run. Although the Rourke family (Case Study 15) lived on a relatively isolated station, they had good access to library books. Once a fortnight, the mail run would include a box of books from the library in a coastal town 300 kilometres away. The librarian would send them books she thought the family will enjoy, and they chose from this selection.

Among the other half of the case study families that did not make regular use of public libraries for recreational reading, most students made some use of books sent to them from the school libraries, either for recreational reading or research. There were a few children who said that they did not use public libraries for any purpose, including one student who said that she had "never been to a public library" (Case Study 4).

Although some students had a very large number of their own books, and some of the adults who supervised the students had very large numbers of books in the home, the average (median) number of books was about 80 for students and 200 for adult supervisors.

Writing

All survey respondents (except for one adult in the referral category) reported doing some writing in the week prior to completing the questionnaire. Table 4 shows that the most common writing done by adults consisted of letters and work-related writing. Other kinds of writing included word puzzles and crosswords, report writing for children's school work, books and articles, translations, shopping lists and "to do" lists, messages, faxes, official forms, and preparation of classes.

Table 4

Writing done in the last week by adult respondents in each category

Writing	N (%)
Letters	96 (73.3)
Work-related	86 (65.5)
Personal journal	30 (22.9)
Tertiary studies	12 (9.2)
Other	26 (19.8)

The most common forms of writing reported in case study families were diaries and letters. Writing was generally less frequently reported in the case studies than the survey. In about half of the case studies, adults reported keeping diaries including station diaries (Case Study 2, 10, 11, 13 & 15), an art diary (Case Study 9), a travel diary (Case Study 7) and personal dairies (Case

Study 2 & 6). In many families children wrote letters to relations (Case Study 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, & 11) and pen pals (Case Study 3 & 15). A few adults also reported writing letters to members of their families (Case Study 7 & 8), but others said that they no longer wrote letters because "the telephone has made it easy" (Case Study 2, 4, 10, 11 & 15). A few other families reported adult writing in relation to postgraduate study (Case Study 3), teaching preparation (Case Study 3 & 6) and religious practices (Case Study 14).

Several students had also initiated writing projects of their own. David Cooke's admiration of Asterix comics (Case Study 6) had led him to write a similar set of cartoon strips about his favourite stuffed toy Ralph. He had begun writing a book about Ralph which he hoped might lead to a career as a cartoonist. In addition to school-related writing and letters to her siblings, friends and grandmother, Sophie Dansie (Case Study 8) had started several writing large projects of her own. These included a novel she started writing at the beginning of the year, and the newsletter for a club she has started with some of the older children at her school of the air.

Television

Adult and child participants in the study were also asked about their television and video viewing habits. Respondents in remote areas commented that their access to television "depends on weather" or that they had "no TV", so it was perhaps not surprising that the number of hours they reported watching television was less that might be expected of an urban sample. On average, adults reported watching television for 1.4 hours per day, and 22% watched videos at least once a week, the majority (59%) watching them less than once a week. On the whole, adults reported watching somewhat less television than students. Because of their remoteness, it was expected that respondents might watch more videos instead of television: overall, 41% of respondents watched videos at least once a week, the rates being somewhat higher among referrals and overseas students than in the other categories.

The case studies revealed a wide range of viewing habits, ranging from families that made a great deal of use of television to families that preferred to limit the amount of access children had to television. At the extreme of limited use of television were the Douglas and Kelly families. Dr Douglas (Case Study 9) counted limited access to television as one of the advantages of having moved from the city to their pastoral lease. Her children had to go to another family's house if they wanted to watch television. The Kelly family (Case Study 13) did not have a satellite dish, and thus watched videos rather than broadcast television. Even so, they could only watch videos at night when the power plant was on.

At the other end of the continuum were the Riley, Camisa and Jekich families. The Riley family (Case Study 1) had four televisions, in order to cater for the different ages of the family members. On weekends, the children were permitted to watch their own programs in their bed-rooms, but on week nights their televisions were sometimes unplugged because they tended to stay up too late. In Daphne Jekich's home (Case Study 12) there were four

televisions and three video recorders. Mrs Jekich indicated that members of the family tended not to watch television together as "there is a television in each room" and "they watch all the time". Daphne had the television on while she studied in her bedroom but paid little attention to it. She said she really only watched it for about "an hour or so in the night time". Similarly, the television was on all of the time in the Camisa's home (Case Study 5) but it was only in the evening that they actually "watch" TV. Mr Camisa enjoyed watching comedy and science fiction programs. James and Mr Camisa "love *The Simpsons*". Their daughters, who live in the city, videoed these programs and sent them up to the family in Macedon. James added that his father liked *Married with Children, Star Trek* and *Red Beard.* James watched television from 5.00 PM to 9.00 PM each day. As well as *The Simpsons,* he enjoyed *Married with Children* and *Heartbreak High.*

The rest of the case study families' television practices lay somewhere between the Dr Douglas's preference for no television and the constant background noise of multiple television sets in the Jekich family.

Computers

Fewer than 40% of the families responding to the survey had access to a computer for the students' school work. Nine of the fifteen case study students (60%) had access to a computer, including all four of the school of the air students. Table 5 shows that in most student categories, computers were commonly used for games and word processing, and small proportions of students used other kinds of software. More information on computer use may be found in Chapter 4, *Technology.*

Table 5

Computer programs used by respondents in each category

Category	Word Processor	Games	Educational games	Spreadsheets	Drawing programs	Integrated software	Programming	Hypercard
Country	14 (22)	37 (59)	7 (11)	3 (5)	8 (13)	16 (25)	4(6)	18 (29)
Traveller	2 (11)	6 (33)	3 (17)	1 (6)	1 (6)	1 (6)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Overseas	13 (56)	14 (61)	4 (17)	0 (0)	5 (22)	0 (0)	1 (4)	0 (0)
Referral	7 (23)	10 (32)	1 (3)	1 (3)	1 (3)	2 (6)	2 (6)	0 (0)
Adult	6 (29)	5 (24)	0 (0)	2 (10)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (5)	0 (0)

Note: Figures in brackets are percentages of each category

Some of the case study students, such as Sophie Dansie (Case Study 8), were accomplished computer users. In other families the school computer was described as "the dreaded computer" and "a time waster" (Case Study 13). On pastoral stations, educational computer use was often limited by family decisions about when to run the lighting plant. In other contexts, computer use could have been increased if ancillary equipment such as a modem or printer had been available (Case Study 10, 11 & 14).

English Grades

It was expected that students' school work practices and their leisure time practices with literature and other media may predict their performance in English. To determine this, correlations between English grade and other variables were calculated. The majority of the variables shown in Table 6 were *not* significantly correlated with English grade. The strongest predictor of English grade was frequency of reading books (other than for school). Children who read books the most were somewhat more likely to obtain higher English grades. However, it should be noted that even those correlations marked with an asterisk as being statistically significant, are moderately low, and therefore knowledge of students' practices with literature and other media predict very little about the grades these students are likely to obtain in English.

Table 6

Correlations between English grade and other variables

Variable	Correlation with English grade
General	
Gender	.1982
Year level	-.2840*
Time in distance education	.0663
School work practices	
Hours per day spent on school work	.1420
Regularity of Timetable	.1401
Attendance by adult during school work	-.0136
Frequency with which home tutor checks work	.2095
Priority given to asking somebody at home for help when school work is difficult	.1925
Priority given to reading the textbook when school work is difficult	-.0420
Priority given to ringing up the teacher when school work is difficult	-.1816
Priority given to asking a teacher or tutor who is with the respondent when school work is difficult	.0429
Priority given to doing as much as possible alone when school work is difficult	-.0020
Leisure time literature and other media practices	
Frequency of reading books	.3537**
Number of books	-.0822
Frequency of reading newspapers or magazines	-.1200
Frequency of consulting an encyclopaedia	-.1752
Frequency of writing (apart from school work)	.0558
Hours spent watching television	-.1765
Frequency of video viewing	.0544
Recency of last visit to a library	.0428
Frequency of computer use (other than for school)	.0896

*p<.05 **p<.01

In order to determine whether adults' print and media practices predicted children's performance in English, correlations between English grade and adults' responses were also calculated. Table 7 shows that adults who read together with one of their children and who talked to one of their children about something they had read were more likely to have children who achieved higher English grades. Also, the greater the number of ways (as assessed in this study) in which adults interacted with one of their children in regard to reading and writing, the more likely they were to have a child who achieved higher English grades. However, like the correlations in Table 6, these correlations are all quite small.

Table 7

Correlations between English grade and adult variables

Variable	Correlation with English grade
Adult print and media practices	
Frequency of reading books	.2041
Number of books	.0730
Hours spent watching television	-.1247
Frequency of video viewing	.1498
Supervision of child's school work	
Frequency of supervision of child's school work	.0793
Interactions between adult and child in last week	
Adult told child to go to a book to find the answer to a question	.1754
Adult talked to child about something the child had been reading	.1127
Adult talked to child about something the adult had been reading	.2618*
Adult and child consulted a book together to find out how to do something around the house or property	.1613
Adult and child read aloud together	.3246**
Adult and child did writing together	.1421
Adult and child discussed something they had seen on television or video	-.0749
Adult and child discussed something they had heard on the radio	-.1289
Adult and child played games on computer together	-.0506
Total number of activities (listed above) done in the last week	.2330*

*p<.05 **p<.01

Conclusion

Most of the factors investigated in the survey did not predict students' English grades. Most of those that did were directly related to practices with books, including the frequency with which students read books; whether their home

supervisor read aloud with any of the children in the household; whether their home supervisor discussed things that he or she had been reading with any of the children in the household; and the number of ways in which their home supervisor interacted with any of the children in regard to reading and writing. However, all associations with English grades were quite weak.

Similar observations may be made on the basis of the case studies. Five of the fifteen students involved in the case studies were identified by their teachers as higher achievers. Among these students there was some evidence the kinds of home backgrounds that predict school success. William Douglas (Case Study 7) was an avid reader. He read "a heap", he said. "I read about a book every night. A whole book a night. I'm a pretty fast reader." Although he lived on a station he had good access to libraries, and used both the town library and the distance education library. His mother, who was not a reader of fiction, read medical journals in order to keep up to date with the latest knowledge in her field. Dr Douglas kept all of the company books for their business partnership. In order to sit exams to keep her medical registration up to date, Dr Douglas studied and wrote reports. About once a month on a regular basis the children and Dr Douglas all wrote letters to their relatives. Little television was watched in their family. Through her supervision of William's distance learning, Dr Douglas had many opportunities to talk with him about reading and writing. The case study contains several examples of debates between William and Dr Douglas over questions such as the truth of texts. Dr Douglas checked all of his school work before it was submitted and frequently challenged errors in William's propositional knowledge. All of these characteristics of William's home literacy environment—his reading, his access to books, his parents' modelling of useful reading and writing, and substantive discussions about the meaning of texts—were among the factors which have been associated with school success in literacy.

Sophie Dansie (Case Study 8) also fitted many of the characteristics of families whose children could expect to be successful at school. Sophie was a keen reader. "If I find a really good book I'll read it and won't be able to put it down. I just like reading," she said. She had "quite a few" books and good access to library books through her school of the air mailings and daily contact with the school. "We ask our teachers over the air or we write them a letter and ask them if they can get the books," she said. "They send them out in the mail and sometimes when we go in we buy books from the bookshop." Sophie had also started some major writing projects of her own. Her mother had many opportunities to discuss literacy related matters with her, both in the context of school work and during family activities. Mrs Dansie listed a series of literacy interactions she had had in the days before the researchers visited their property. Her practices as a home tutor, described in Chapter 5, *Supervision*, were characterised by close involvement in her children's learning and a wide range of textual and other strategies. Mrs Dansie also wrote letters frequently. Unlike Dr Douglas, Mr and Mrs Dansie watched "three or four hours" of television a day. They read newspapers when they were available and "all the rural magazines", but restricted their novel reading to holiday times.

The Daniels family (Case Study 7) also fitted some of the patterns of home background that have been associated with school success. They were avid readers and made frequent use of the local library. Before they sold their home and began travelling in their caravan, they had a very large library. They sold many of their books before setting out on their travels, but still had about seven cartons of books in storage. Mrs Daniels read as much as she could. "While Chris is doing school work I'll quite often sit and read," she said, "and there's a good hour or so in the afternoon when I'll read and before I go to sleep at night." Mr Daniels kept a diary of their travels. Mrs Daniels enjoyed letter writing and wrote several letters a week. Chris wrote to his older sister Jeannie because he liked to tell her about things he couldn't discuss with his parents. Chris and his mother enjoyed doing crosswords and puzzles together, particularly when they were travelling. Mrs Daniel's supervision of Chris's school work, described in some detail in Chapter 5, was characterised by close involvement in helping Christopher to explicate the meaning of texts. Although there was a television in the caravan the family didn't watch a lot of television. Chris usually watched from about 4-30 until 6-00 PM. He enjoyed watching informational programs.

Justin Beard (Case Study 3), a fourth student in the higher achieving group of students, also fitted some of the patterns associated with school success. Justin was not a very keen fiction reader, but he had access to a small family library, a school library, and the local public library (if he ordered books to be brought out on the mail run). When the children were young Mr and Mrs Beard always read them a story in the morning and at night. In recent years Mr and Mrs Beard had been too busy to do much reading except for work purposes and had "got out of the habit of reading". Both Mr and Mrs Beard are school principals, and they write at home in connection with their work and, in Mrs Beard's case, her post-graduate education. Television did not play an important role in the Beard family. The children watched some of the children's shows in the late afternoon and then the family watched the news and current affairs. Justin was older than Sophie, William and Chris, and was a very independent and self-sufficient learner. When Mrs Beard assisted him with his school work, however, she adopted the same sort of questioning and clarifying strategies used by Mrs Dansie and Mrs Daniels.

The fifth and final student identified as among the higher achievers, Daphne Jekich, did not fit the predictable patterns of family literacy practices. Although she was a keen reader who enjoyed Stephen King and Virginia Andrews novels, she came from a family that had few books and whose members rarely read. Her father was not literate in English. Daphne was not a member of the local library. There were four televisions and three video recorders in the family and they "watch all the time". Daphne studied in her room, with the television turned on. When the researcher visited her, there was a gripping movie on television about a custody battle between a mother and father but Daphne took little notice of it. Daphne did not have a good relationship with her mother and would not tolerate parental involvement in her work. Besides, Mrs Jekich said, "I really can't help her because I'm not good at English". With very few of the factors in her background predicting success, it was not surprising to hear that Daphne had been a poor performer at the local

secondary school and had left without completing Year 10. Working on distance education, however, the combination of support from the Distance Education Centre and her own quiet determination to complete her education allowed Daphne to achieve "A" grade results in her school work.

Considered together, the survey and case study conclusions about the relationship between English grades and family practices are consistent with other results reported in the literature. Relatively low levels of significance for correlations in the survey were matched by inconsistent results in the case studies. Some of the families were keen readers, but not all. Some parents read to the children when they were young, but not all. Some of the students liked reading outside of school, but not all. Some students made use of the libraries that were available, but not all. Some of the parents had many literacy interactions with their children, but not all. Some of the families seemed to watch a great deal more television than others. Four of the students were in families where many of the characteristics associated with school success were present, but one—Daphne Jekich—was not.

These results are also consistent with the researchers' previous work on the relationship between family literacy practices and social class (Louden, 1994). As that study observed, although the family literacy practices associated with middle-class families are the most powerful predictor of school success, correlations between social class location and school performance do not capture the complexities of educational inequality. Families are not fixed in a static class location, but they actively construct and negotiate their futures. One of the key sites for this negotiation is the educational system. For some students, such as William and Justin whose parents were university educated, the school system may allow them to reproduce their parents' high achievement. For others, such as Sophie and Christopher, whose parents left school early, success in the education system may be part of their families' trajectory of social mobility. And finally, for students such as Daphne, dogged individual endeavour may be required to overcome the probability of poor performance in regular schools.

CHAPTER 3
TEXTS AND TASKS

This chapter describes the use distance education students made of their printed sets of work. The descriptions of lessons are drawn from all of the case study families and include examples from English, social studies, mathematics and science activities. Following the lesson descriptions, a set of common textual practices used by these distance education students is identified. Based on the case study data, the common textual practices appear to include:

- skimming the text for tasks;
- deciding what is essential;
- going step by step;
- sticking to the facts;
- focusing on finishing; and
- calling for help.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of home tutors' reflections on their experience of using the printed curriculum materials.

English

Emily Baker (Case Study 2) is a very experienced distance education learner, with well-established strategies for completing a set of work. Her first step each day, before she started to work on language (or mathematics), was to consult the chart of activities made for her by her governess, Tracey. As Emily explained:

> Tracey makes up this chart for me [for] every set and it goes all the way to day 10. You just go through it and find out what the activities [are]. You've read the story and you do the drama and you read through it, but it just doesn't take as long because you know what you have to do.

Emily's calculations about exactly what "you have to do" were shaped by a sense of what is really essential and what is optional in the distance education texts provided for her. For example, she regarded the written outcomes which would be marked as much more important than the stimulus materials provided for her to read. Her strategy was to look at the plan and focus on those activities which were listed on the plan. As she said, "If I don't find a set interesting, I usually just don't read the stories." As she worked through the distance education materials, she also used the typography as a guide to what she should do. In the case of her current language materials, she regarded the text in bold type face as compulsory. "All these things in dark writing you have to do", she explained, "and these other parts of the page you can read if you want to learn more things about it." Similarly, she had learned that not all parts of the curriculum were essential. "You don't really have to do drama",

she said, "but it is fun". Sometimes, she miscalculated the amount of work she has to do. In these cases, Tracey's marking was her guide:

> I don't really know when I've done enough because, well, Tracey, goes around and anything that I haven't done or [she] wants me to re-do again, I do that the next day, because she doesn't mark during the day, she marks after.

Using these three strategies—focus on the plan, read the text in bold, re-do any work identified by the governess—Emily worked through her language activities in a well organised and efficient manner. "I like to get everything over and done with," she said. She worked towards the goal of completing the set. As she said, "I really feel good when the set is over because I have done a good job and because it is finished at last." Emily's textual strategies are illustrated in the following excerpt from an English lesson.

Emily was working on a Year 6 language set entitled *Grans and Gramps* when the researcher visited her. She began by consulting Tracey's chart for the set. Next, she read aloud from the instructions in the text. As she read aloud, she tried to work out what the instructions meant she had to do. (The text she read aloud is marked by quotation marks.)

> "Exercise 4. Write your own thoughts about your grandparents. You may choose to write about one grandparent only if you wish. Illustrate your work too." Okay, Exercise 4, now, tell us about my grandparents, so, write reports about your grandparents.

She worked in silence for 2 minutes 30 seconds before turning to the researcher to ask, "How do you spell sense of humour? Is it with an 's'?" After a further 15 seconds she asked another question. ("Sense of humour's one word isn't it?") After being told that there is an "of" in the middle of "sense of humour" she worked in silence for another minute, before announcing that she had finished her language work.

Emily's way of reading the distance education text sharply truncated the work on grandparents. When she read the instructions for Exercise 4, she actually read only the part of the instruction that referred to what had to be sent in to the teacher. This section was printed in bold and marked with a letter box indicating that the work would be marked by the teacher. She did not read the stimulus material above the instruction, which was not in bold, and which directed her to read a one and a half page spread of illustrations and text. The instructions read:

> Opposite is a collection of pictures and comments by young children about their grandparents. Look at the pictures and read the comments. What overall impression do you get from them? To these children, what are grandparents for? What do you think about grandparents?

One of the consequences of this reading strategy was that she was able to complete the work required in fewer than five minutes, producing just two sentences of text about her grandparents. Emily's practice of following the bold instructions and missing the stories significantly reduced the reading required to complete one of these language sets. In set 11, for example, the literature stimulus material comprised 39 of the 77 pages of school work provided in the set.

Similar textual strategies were used by Peta Cameron (Case Study 4) in her work on another section of the same *Grans and Gramps* Year 6 language set. Peta's enthusiasm for quickly completing the task prevented her from reading the text closely enough to make the most of the language learning opportunities provided in the text. Like Emily, Peta skimmed over the introduction to the task before going straight to the activity she was asked to complete. When she found that she did not understand the task she did not re-read the instructions. Instead, she asked her home tutor to help her. With that assistance, she was able to complete the first task. She quickly skimmed the introduction to the second task, before going straight to the activity she was asked to complete. She omitted a lengthy piece of explanatory text and missed out on background information provided for the activity. With some further assistance from the home tutor, who revised the information in the text and reformulated the task to make it more understandable, Peta was eventually able to complete the task.

Like Peta and Emily, William Douglas (Case Study 9) began his Year 7 English lesson by quickly skimming through the instructions looking for the task that he was required to do. He was asked to read through a play which provided different points of view about the preservation of trees, and then to list reasons under the headings: "save the tree" and "chop down the tree". He read the play and quickly wrote:

> *Save the tree*
> the children have played in the tree for along time. The children's parents pay rates. The tree doesn't do any harm.
>
> *Chop down the tree*
> It costs of money to pune the trees. It costs a lot of money to water the trees.

When he had completed this task, he briefly referred back to the text to find out what to do next. However in his haste to complete the next activity he failed to read the instructions accurately. He had been asked to write brief notes about the rescue of an endangered plant, animal, region or building and then write a summary paragraph of how the rescue took place. He misinterpreted the task and instead wrote a summary of the play which provided the background for the previous task he had just finished.

Emily's, William's and Peta's work on their English sets may be contrasted with Justin Beard's approach to English (Case Study 3). Justin worked alone on

his English sets in the store room of a local primary school. He had photocopied the pages out of his study guide because he found it difficult to read the parts on the back of the pages. He had also checked the number of marks each activity was worth, so that he would know how much effort to put into an activity. Justin was working on an activity related to the novel *The October Child*. In this novel one of the characters is an autistic child. Students were asked to read some information about autism and then identify parts in the novel which demonstrated the characteristics of autism. He explained the process he used to clarify questions and generate his answers:

> Well I usually go through with a highlighter and well, for this task it says 'How closely does Carl fit the above description of an autistic child?' For instance what evidence would that word 'evidence' be generally known to mean? Do they want you to pick something out of the passage so you have to back that up with quotations and stuff like that. 'Is there any evidence for any or the following' [characteristics of autism] and they've listed it there. So, then I just add a bit more to that by putting my personal opinion.

Justin had already marked different parts in the novel which he thought demonstrated the characteristics of autism, so he switched on the computer and began to type up his answers. When Justin finished writing his responses, he edited his work on the screen and then printed it out, ready to send to his teachers.

Justin's English strategies shared some of the characteristics Emily, Peta and William. Like his peers, he had a strong focus on the tasks that had to be completed and would be assessed. This focus on getting the most important task done, however, did not prevent him from reading the text carefully. In contrast, the strategy Emily, Peta and William all used—skimming the text and looking for the task—caused them difficulties in completing the task satisfactorily. Emily read only the instructions in bold, and this led her to omit almost all of the reading provided for the day, and reduced her writing task to something that could be completed in a few minutes. Peta also skimmed the text and looked for the task. She omitted a lengthy piece of explanatory text and missed out on background information provided for the activity. She did not re-read the text when she found that she could not understand the task. Peta relied on her home tutor to revise the content of the text and reinterpret the task so that she could complete it. William, too, worked quickly through the tasks, failed to read the instructions accurately and thus did not complete the task which actually appeared in the text.

Unlike Emily, Peta, William or Justin, Shaun Jacob's (Case Study 10) enthusiasm for getting his English done as soon as possible was not supported by independent learning skills. Confronted by a comprehension exercise in his Year 6 English unit, Shaun was not able to work without support from his home tutor. When she noticed that Shaun had made no progress on the comprehension questions she worked through them orally with him, but he was distracted and she had to repeat some of the questions. Later in the lesson

when Shaun was required to write a story about hunting elephants, his home tutor provided more support by suggesting that he "read, look at the question first to see what you think about the situation", "jot down a whole lot of ideas and words that are associated with hunting elephants" and "then have a look at the question". Shaun settled to work and wrote a brief paragraph on the computer. While the home tutor provided some assistance to his brother Greg, Shaun rested. When the tutor was free, he asked her to repeat the instruction from the text. The home tutor looked at the computer screen and suggested that Shaun could "write more than one little paragraph", but Shaun was distracted by one of the dogs which had wandered into the school room. Asked to continue with his work, Shaun responded by asking the home tutor to spell "extinction" She noticed that he had not begun writing, so she read the instructions aloud to him. He read back aloud the text he had written.

> People should not kill animals just for fun but you can kill foxes and rabbits. Just for fun full stop. Foxes and rabbits can be killed for fun just because they will never run out. People should not kill animals just for fun only for their own need.

Kirsty responded to this text be asking Shaun whether this applied to "cattle and kangaroos" and a brief discussion developed, before being cut short by the arrival of smoko time. Unlike any of the other students whose work in English has been described—and like perhaps only one other student in the whole study—Shaun's desire to get his work finished did not motivate him to work quickly. More like many students in regular schools, he was content to split his attention between the task and the social environment of the school room, and rely on his home tutor to regulate his time and energy.

Social Studies

The work of three students, Justin Beard, Owen Abrahams and James Camisa, will be used to explore the roles of language in learning social studies by distance education. Owen Abrahams (Case Study 1) was working on a Year 8 social studies unit about the agrarian revolution called *A Revolution In Farming*. He read about the layout of a manor and was then required to mark the different features of a manor on a map provided in the text. He skimmed through the text and quickly moved on to do the activity. Because he had not engaged fully with the text he did not have enough information to complete the task and found it arduous. Subsequently, he re-read the text several times but had some difficulty following the directions. After reading the instructions aloud Owen sought assistance because he couldn't work out how to fill in the map. He was unable to work out where the peasants lived or where the fallow field was shown. This was probably due to his confusion about the meaning of fallow. In the following transcript the miscues made by Owen as he read the text have been marked:

OWEN: 'In the last lesson you learnt about the system of feudalism in Europe. In the Middle Ages you came to understand how a Baron would grant a stake of land to take a knight. In return for this

the knight had to fight in wars for the Baron. The proper name for this state of land was the Manor, Manors. The knight became known as the Lord of the Manor. Usually the Manor considered (*miscue for* ***consisted***) of the following, a village where the serfs and peasants lived, farm land, common land, land on which anyone could graze their animal (***s*** *omitted*), a fine manor house for the lord, a church and priests (***house*** *omitted*), a village well, a large mill for grinding village wheat and a village stream. Can you find these topical (*miscue for* ***typical)*** features of (***a*** *omitted*) Manor in the diagram? Most of *(miscue for* ***match)*** the features (inaudible, ***below*** *omitted*) with their use (inaudible, ***positions*** *omitted*) on the map of the feudal manor of the Middle Age (**s** *omitted).* Write in the correct letter of, on the map. One has been done for you. (*pause 40 secs*)

INT: Where are the peasants do you think?

OWEN: Here (inaudible).

INT: No, don't these look like huts there, don't they? (*pause 20 secs*) What's the next one? Keep going.

OWEN: Three big fields.

INT: Mmm. Was there one that wasn't cultivated? Did they clear that? That's right. One of them they'd always leave, not grow any crops on it, give it a rest because if you planted too much on it the soil gets worn out.

The three field system was explained in the next section of the text. He had difficulty with the words "fallow" and "ploughed". He did not link their meaning to the explanation given in the sentence, "The soil was allowed to rest." He struggled on with the activities not fully understanding the logic of the text. In the next section the text read as follows:

> The number of strips that a farmer had depended on his position in society or how wealthy he was. For example, in the diagram above, Roger has more strips of land than Troll. We can assume that Roger is wealthier than Troll. Notice also that a number of strips are next to the river. Farmers felt that it was important to own strips near the river.

He was asked to consult a very complex map which showed the position of the three fields and the strips of land held by two of the farmers. The students were expected to deduce from the number and location of the strips held by one of the farmers that he was wealthier and more important than the other farmer. Owen found it difficult to make sense of the map and to understand the concepts behind the lesson. Nevertheless, with some assistance he

persisted with the activity and completed the whole of the activity. The students were then asked to answer this question: "Why would you say that it was important to have land near the river?" The text did not tell the students that Roger had a number of strips next to the river, although this was shown in the map. Owen did not connect the information in the written text with the information in map, and consequently connect the ownership of river strips with being wealthy. He was unable to relate the need to attain good land next to the river with the likelihood of getting better crops, which would in turn provide more wealth for those people who owned the riverside strips of land. Owen's dogged perseverance and willingness to ask for assistance allowed him to complete his social studies activities, but his limited reading skills and inability to infer from the text prevented him from developing a systematic understanding of the topic.

Justin Beard (Case Study 3), by way of contrast, had a more sophisticated understanding of the language strategies required to be considered successful in social studies. For example, Justin was able to articulate the characteristics of a good essay and distinguish between the demands of writing in English and social studies:

> Generally I just stick to the point ... my social studies teacher likes me to include nothing but bare facts sort of thing and not waffle on in social studies, but in English they like to elaborate and get a lot of your personal ideas in the topic.

Consistent with his construction of social studies as "nothing but the bare facts", Justin had a way of finding the facts in the text and then using these to complete the activities. "If I have to," he said, "I will go back and highlight the main points. Sometimes I do that but with this one it's really only [a matter of] emphasising what I have already done in the previous activities." Justin had also negotiated with his supervisor about completion of non-assessable activities. As he did not have sufficient time to complete all of the non-assessable activities, he would read these and then just finish the tasks for which marks were assigned,

Justin was working on a Year 9 unit of work called *Law and Life* when the researcher visited him. He had been reading about crime rates in Australia, and he was expected to write about causes of crime and the copy-cat theory of crime. He assumed that he should agree with the copy-cat theory because the information provided in the text had provided statistics to demonstrate that crime in Australia had increased. He showed a good knowledge of the genre of exposition and the importance of substantiating his arguments. Notice how he explained these issues in the following discussion:

JUSTIN:	I've got to 'Briefly explain in your own words what is meant by the copy-cat theory'.
INT:	Oh, I see.

JUSTIN: And 'Do you think the copy-cat theory is important. In this example explain the cause of crime', yeah.

INT: So how are you going to work out your answer to that one?

JUSTIN: Well I'll say that it is important. It is a cause of crime.

INT: And why do you think that?

JUSTIN: Well I'll say that they get a lot of their ideas from what they see, what they hear on TV and what they hear from their friends, and seeing what they read in books I guess, and yeah, I'll back it up with that.

When the researcher suggested it would be possible to argue a different position on this question, he agreed, but was unsure about whether or not this would be acceptable to the teacher. He believed that what counted for the teacher was the ability of students to demonstrate they had learned the facts in the text. His belief in the authority of the text was confirmed in another discussion in which he explained a previous task. He had been asked to "Imagine you are a crime reporter for a daily newspaper. Your editor has asked you to write a short article for the weekend edition on two offences against a person." Justin described how he thought he had written the newspaper report without any bias. When the researcher challenged the neutrality of his account he demonstrated the capacity to recognise the way values are constructed through texts, although he felt it was safer to stick to "the bare facts" in social studies.

Like Justin, James Camisa (Case Study 5) was working on Year 9 social studies. One of the researchers had the opportunity to watch James at work on the *Australian Government* unit at a residential school camp. James worked on the unit for 30 minutes. First he read carefully the general section about beliefs and values. One question that he did not answer asked "What does it mean about a person's values if he or she ticks the 'no opinion' column?" He then looked at the section on political opinion polls. It took him quite a long time to work out the instructions with the assistance of the dictionary. The questions and the answers he gave appear in the quotation below:

1(a) List the three most important influences on your beliefs and opinions

Answer: Family, Friends and School (*He used all of the available writing space*).

(b) Give an example of how your beliefs or opinions have been influenced

Answer: "Smoking. I think smoking is bad because smoking is bad for you" (*He used all of the available writing space*).

2 In the election of July 11 1987 the ALP won.

Now study the opinion polls in this lesson again and answer these questions.

a) Did the opinion polls predict that the ALP would win? (Yes/No 1 mark)

b) Was there any time that the Lib/Nat Party could have won the election? (Yes/No 1 mark).

James did not attempt to write answers to Question 2. He appeared to be unsure about what was required. The third question required him to refer to a table drawn from an opinion poll and write "a report of about 100 words to explain why the ALP won the election". James answered as follows:

> The ALP won the election in 1987 Because most people thought they had a better leader. Bob Hawlk and the laberer running the economy. And most likely to reduce unemployment, also keep unions and strikes under control. The both parties has a better tax policies. (*correctly quoted*)

This report correctly interpreted the data presented in the table. James then looked at a section of the text that dealt with the section on political parties. He appeared to read the text word-by-word. The lesson concluded before James worked on the assessment for this section. Throughout this lesson James worked quietly and steadily. He completed the sections of the work which required him to state his personal opinions and interpreted a table. He omitted the sections which required inference from the text. He did not ask for assistance from the teacher.

The school camp was an unfamiliar context for James. When he worked at home, his mother was able to assist him with his learning. Usually, she said, she would sit with James, read through the lessons with him and discuss the questions. The social studies teacher had suggested that Mrs Camisa encourage James to read the questions in the text more than once, in order to be sure that he understood the question.

The contrast between Justin's, Owen's and James's use of language in social studies is more pronounced than the contrast between Justin and Emily, Peta and William in English. Owen showed a dogged willingness to keep re-reading the text in the hope that he would come to understand it, but his limited reading skills reduced the possibility that he would be able to make the inferences required in the text. For him, print-based distance education materials which relied on complex reading skills were not likely to be very effective. James, too had limited reading skills and required support to answer more complex social studies questions requiring inference. Like Owen, he was more than willing to work his way through the work he had been set and to complete the part of it he understood. For Justin, who had highly developed reading and writing skills the print-based materials posed no problems. He was easily able to locate "the facts" that he believed his social studies teacher was looking for. His focus on the facts, however, truncated the possibilities of

using his reading and writing skills to explore the values behind the texts he was reading and being asked to write.

Mathematics

Peta Cameron (Casse Study 4) regarded maths and science as fun. "It is fun doing them," she said. "I'm good at them, they're easy to do and also they're fun". When she began her maths for the day, she concentrated hard and worked systematically on some simple calculations. Then she began a new task about tessellations, in which the reading requirements were more challenging. Peta looked at the text for a while and then asked for help. Helga, her governess, began to help her with the concept of tessellation, but then realised that Peta was having trouble reading the text, so she helped her with the pronunciation and gave her a similar word pattern to help her remember it. She then encouraged Peta to understand the concept from the examples in the book. At first Peta had trouble with the meaning of "overlaps" but with some help she worked this out from the diagrams.

Peta completed the first tessellation exercise and then encountered another problem with reading the text. Helga helped her with the pronunciation and clarified the meaning of parallel for her:

PETA:	It's (inaudible) triangles or, what's that word?
HELGA:	Parallelograms. Do you know what parallel means? The pencil and the pen are parallel, now all three are parallel. They're going the same way. Are they parallel?
PETA:	No, but they're going the same way.
HELGA:	Okay, they'd be parallel if you put them like that or like that. They can be parallel.
PETA:	Yeah but this wasn't parallel.
HELGA:	No, yes it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter as long as the sides are going the same way. Okay (inaudible) parallelogram in five, go the same way. You've done it before anyway.

Helga explained the next task in which the students were asked to make their own tessellation pattern using their knowledge about parallelograms. Peta began the activity with enthusiasm. It entailed some cutting out, which offered her a welcome change of activity. The task was actually more difficult than it first appeared to be. In order to attain the required outcome, it needed a thorough understanding of the notion of a parallelogram, as well as accurate cutting and pasting skills. When Helga attempted to explain the problem to Peta she became upset, so Helga tried to show her how to complete the task without worrying any further about her understanding of the concept. "Just cut it as big as the other one was," she said to Peta

Like Peta, Troy Proctor (Case Study 14) said that he was "good at maths" and that he liked the subject. Before he began for the day he set the alarm on his watch for 45 minutes. Then he set to work with interest and read the text with apparent ease. The activity concerned Pythagoras' theorem. He quickly read through the example showing how to calculate the length of one side of a right angled triangle and then moved straight on to the first exercise. He completed this exercise without any difficulty and marked his work. He said that when he had difficulty with his maths he sometimes looked at the answers and worked backwards from the answers to resolve the problem. This wasn't cheating, he said. He just used this strategy to help him resolve any problems. He then moved straight on to the next exercise which he also marked when it was finished. He stapled his work to the page and moved on to the next day's work about surveys.

Before beginning his next day's maths activity he set his watch for another 45 minutes. He read through a one page explanation about surveys and then went straight to an exercise in which he was asked to explain the bias in a number of surveys which were described in the text book. Troy had no problems in detecting the bias in the examples given but did have some problems in writing his explanations so that they could be understood by someone else. The answer which read "the suburb was proberly Subiaco so supporting there own team", for example, would only explain the bias to a reader who could fill in the contextual ties by referring back from the sentence to the original text.

Like Troy, Justin Beard (Case Study 3) was very focussed when he did maths. He read through the text very quickly and moved straight on to the examples in the special maths book which accompanied the text. He did not have any difficulty in understanding the maths concepts and appeared to be working at a level beyond which his mother could offer to help him. When he had problems, he said, he would save them up for the tutor who came to help him on Mondays.

All three of these students enjoyed mathematics and settled quickly and willingly to the work in their sets. Peta worked through the set systematically until she encountered a reading task that she did not understand. She looked at the text for a while, and then asked her home tutor to help her. The home tutor assisted her with both the reading task and the conceptual knowledge she required. When a practical task that Peta was enjoying became too difficult for her, and it became clear to the home tutor that Peta did not have the essential knowledge about parallelograms, the home tutor had to decide between offering further assistance and showing Peta how complete the task that had been set. As Peta had by this time become frustrated and upset about her lack of success, the tutor decided just to help her finish the task. Troy was equally enthusiastic and committed to completing his mathematics activities. He worked through two days activities, each time setting himself a period of 45 minutes to complete the day's work. He was able to complete the tasks set, although the written answers he prepared on reasons for bias were not written in sentences which were independent of the context provided in the source

text. Justin shared Peta's and Troy's willingness to work quickly through the mathematics text. Although he did not often encounter problems in mathematics, he had a well established method for saving up problems for the tutor who came to help him each Monday morning.

Science

Like Emily, Peta, William and Justin, Christopher Daniels (Case Study 7) had learned to skim through the text and look for the tasks that had to be completed. This familiar strategy was evident in his approach to a section of his science text which dealt with the evolutionary tree. The text contained a complex diagram entitled "part of the evolutionary tree of living things" on one page and some "points to note about the animal group tree" listed on the opposite page. Chris briefly looked at the diagram and then quickly read the ten points on the other page. He then skimmed through the five questions which followed the reading. Ignoring the rest of the questions and the text, Chris moved straight on to answer the related test questions at the back of the booklet because these were the answers which had to be submitted to the teacher. Because he had not fully understood the diagram or the associated reading he became confused by the second question he attempted. At this point Mrs Daniels stepped in to make sure he engaged with the text more effectively. She refocussed Chris on the question and helped him re-read the appropriate part of the text in order to answer the question:

MRS DANIELS: Read through it all again. (*pause 42 secs*) You read it?

CHRIS: Yeah.

MRS DANIELS: Okay, now try again. How many groups of reptiles does this one say?

CHRIS: Well, there was five, but there was birds and mammals.

MRS DANIELS: It says 'of reptiles'. How many groups are there today of reptiles?

CHRIS: (inaudible), snakes and lizards, and (inaudible) and, (inaudible). Four.

MRS DANIELS: Does it say on there, on the scale here. Which ones are (inaudible)... ?

CHRIS: (inaudible) today, these ones are living today, here.

MRS DANIELS: Here.

CHRIS: Yeah. Air reptiles, sea reptiles, and air reptiles. See, they're not kind of birds and mammals.

MRS DANIELS: (inaudible) three groups of reptiles.

CHRIS: Good. (*pause 17 secs*)

Mrs Daniels continued to scaffold his answers successfully until he became confused by the following question:

> One student described dinosaurs as, "two groups of lizards that lived on the land from 225 to 65 million years ago, then became extinct." This definition is incorrect. Correct it.

At first Chris focussed on the time period as the incorrect piece of information, so Mrs Daniels engaged in a lengthy discussion with him. Mrs Daniels enabled Chris to recognise the error in the statement, gently coaxing him on, by jointly constructing the important knowledge with him. First she helped him to establish in which part of the proposition the error was to be found. Having done this, she encouraged him to go back and check whether or not dinosaurs were in fact lizards. Eventually, Chris realised he had misinterpreted the text which actually stated, "Dinosaurs came from the Greek word meaning 'terrible lizard' but they were in fact not lizards." When Chris had resolved the difficulty, Mrs Daniels went on to show him how to frame his answer into the sentence, "dinosaurs are two groups of reptiles that lived on the land."

Chris's method of working with his science text showed that he shared many of the textual strategies used by other students in English, mathematics and social studies. Like Emily, Peta and William, he skimmed through the text looking for tasks to be completed. Like William and Emily, reading too quickly caused him to miss essential information. Like Peta he did not re-read until his mother intervened. Like Justin, he used the assessment criteria to decide what was essential. Like Peta, Owen and James, he needed some assistance to elaborate the meaning of the text.

Textual Practices Of Distance Learning

These accounts of students work in English, social studies, mathematics and science suggest a set of practices that characterise the distance education learners encountered in the case study research. Not all of these practices were used by all of the case study students, all of the time, but none have been listed which were not common. The practices listed in Table 8 may be thought of as modal practices, practices which were the most common among the range the researchers encountered.

Table 8.
Modal textual practices

- Skimming the text for tasks
- Deciding what is essential
- Going step by step
- Sticking to the facts
- Focusing on finishing
- Calling for help

Skimming the Text for Tasks

Throughout this description of students' use of texts in English, social studies, mathematics and science, most of the students read the text very quickly. The most common reading strategy was to skim the text for tasks. In English, Emily skimmed over the text looking for the section written in bold and marked with a letter box which meant that it would have to be sent to the teacher. Peta skimmed the text and missed a long explanatory piece, which meant that she did not understand the task in English. William read his English text too quickly, noticed that he had to write a summary, and wrote a plot summary of the play instead of a summary of a set of notes about the he did not notice he was asked to prepare. Owen skimmed through the social studies text looking for the task, but found that he did not have enough information to complete the task. Christopher skimmed his science text and the supporting diagram and turned directly to the test questions at the back of the book, but found that he had not read the text carefully enough to complete the assessment task without further assistance from his home tutor. Of the students considered in detail in this chapter, only Justin did not rely on the strategy of skimming the text for tasks. His more careful reading strategies included re-reading the text with a highlighting pen before attempting to complete the written tasks he had located in both English and social studies.

Shaun is an exception to this general rule about skimming the text for tasks. Unlike almost all of the students in the study, Shaun's desire to get his work finished did not motivate him to work quickly. In English and in his other subjects he relied on his home tutor to identify the reading and writing tasks and to regulate the time and energy he put into his distance education work.

Deciding What is Essential

Students were generally very conscious of which material was essential and which was optional, and this awareness strongly shaped their textual practices. Emily Baker worked from a list of tasks provided by her governess. The list was itself a summary of the assessable requirements of the set. In addition, she had decided that drama was not really compulsory, and nor was reading stimulus material which was not essential to completion of tasks marked in bold type. Justin knew how many marks each activity was worth, allocated his time proportionally, and negotiated with his social studies teacher to complete only tasks for which marks had been assigned. Christopher went straight to the back of the science book to complete the test items, and only returned to the text when he could not complete the test items. Unlike these more typical students, Shaun seemed largely indifferent to whether he completed material or not. According to his mother, Shaun "just goes from day to day" without any personal sense of responsibility. As Mrs Jacobs explained: "I asked him a couple of things this morning and he says 'Oh I don't know, Oh I might finish that'. You know, he doesn't really, it doesn't worry him."

Focusing on Finishing

In general, the strategy of skimming the text for tasks makes it easier for students to finish their work quickly, because it reduces the complexity of the task. In Emily's case, by responding only to tasks in bold type reduced a 30 or 40 minute set of activities to less than five minutes work. Finishing the set was Emily's goal and her source of satisfaction. "I like to get everything over and done with," she said. "I really feel good when the set is over because I have done a good job and because it is finished at last." Similarly, Justin talked about the importance of getting finished as a source of satisfaction. "I get a bit depressed after a day if I don't think I've done much," he said. William also focused on working quickly, often trying to get ahead of the schedule so that he could have some days off when someone went into town. He tended not to let on if he did not understand something properly, in case his mother made him do it again. Also, he said, if he found the work easy he would "tend to keep quiet so I don't have to do any more." This strong focus on getting finished was also evident in a discussion about the task of writing a summary. "I don't really think about anything," he said. "I just think about getting it done."

One exception this general preference for getting the work finished as soon as possible was Troy Proctor (Case Study 14) who set his alarm and worked for 45 minutes on each subject, and stopped work when the alarm range irrespective or whether he had finished thew activity or not. In some subjects he liked, such as the mathematics example described above, he would willingly go on to the next day's work and set his alarm for another 45 minutes. His mother explained that she did not monitor Troy's work because she realised it caused too much stress and did not achieve results. The pace of his work had been "totally left to him," she explained. If a letter came from the school about work not being completed on time she would "talk to him about that" and he would "concentrate on that area a little bit."

Going Step by Step

Students expressed a strong preference for curriculum materials which had already been constructed as a set of steps. Sophie Dansie (Case Study 8), for example, said that she preferred texts which had "no mumbo jumbo" and went "step by step". Miranda Rourke (Case Study 15) said that she liked materials that were "well set out" Daphne Jekich (Case Study 12) praised texts that were clearly set out so that she could understand easily the tasks required for her to complete the unit. Among lessons described above Peta, Troy and Justin all worked easily through the step by step mathematics tasks.

The distance education materials used by students in the case studies were constructed by some students as a set of steps to be completed, even when the text was not actually laid out in a linear manner. The English text *Grans and Gramps*, which was written approximately ten years ago, was in the style of a theme-work English text of the 1970s. For each day of the *Grans and Gramps* set on which Emily and Peta were working, there was a literature stimulus on some aspect of the theme of grandparents. This literature stimulus was usually

followed by a section called "Think About - Talk About" which provided four or five questions for discussion with the child's home tutor. These comprehension and discussion questions were followed by a series of exercises, which ranged from looking at a set of adjectives that might describe grandparents (Day 6, p. 49) to making jam tarts, an activity justified because "Grandmas often make special treats for their grandchildren" (Day 9, p. 70). The activities were laid out in an informal style across wide A4 pages, and were less linear than the more recent distance education curriculum materials the researchers saw in use, but in any case they were still transformed by students into a set of steps to be completed. As they skimmed for text for tasks and decided what was essential by various strategies, Emily and Peta managed to turn an unusually non-linear text into a set of steps to be completed.

Sticking to the Facts

Even the most successful students with the most well-developed reading and writing skills tended not to adopt a critical attitude to the materials they were asked to read and write. Justin, for example, had decided that his social studies teacher preferred him to "not to waffle on" and to "include nothing but the bare facts". He was aware that "in English they like you to elaborate and get a lot of your personal ideas in the topic" but this did not extend to critique of the text. David Cooke (Case Study 6) was confronted by a mismatch between his construction of reading and the subject requirements of social studies. Since he was mainly interested in reading for pleasure and not analysis, he found the reading and writing requirements of social studies tedious and annoying. Greg Jacobs (Case Study 11) preferred the short answer questions and found it difficult to maintain concentration and motivation, when asked to analyse text or to write an essay length answer.

It was very rare for students or their home tutors to adopt a critical attitude towards the texts they were working with. Mrs Dansie (Case Study 8), for example, was much more willing and persistent than the visiting school principal in searching the text for clues about how to complete an activity on adjectival clauses. Dr Douglas, William's mother was a rare exception to this rule, expressing concerns about historical interpretations in the social studies text and the rigour of the science text. When she attempted to contradict a health education text, however, William argued vehemently that "the book knows" and "books know everything" because "people write down everything in books".

Getting Help

When students were not able to complete the tasks they found in the texts, they used a variety of supplementary strategies. Some, like Peta did not re-read the text in their search for meaning. Instead Peta turned immediately to her home tutor and relied on her to summarise the information in the text and reformulate the task. Owen, on the other hand, re-read the text many times, but lacked the reading skills to proceed without some assistance from an adult. Christopher was fortunate in having a home tutor who carefully and skilfully

scaffolded the text for him in order to allow him to complete the task. Justin had relatively little difficulty with the texts, but when he did he rang his teachers or waited until Monday when his tutor was available to help him. David Cooke (Case Study 6) had learned to re-read the text and if he could not solve the problem he would ask his father for assistance. David was confident that his father would be able to resolve most of his problems, so he rarely had to ring his teachers. Sophie Dansie's behaviour (Case Study 8) was similar. First she tried to "read between the lines" as her mother had taught her. If this strategy failed she would ask her mother for help. If her mother was busy with her younger sister, as was often the case, Sophie would miss out the difficult activity and come back to it later. When Owen met a problem he would ask for assistance after three or four minutes, in order not to waste too much time. He would usually ask his home tutor for help but if he was not there, he tried to work out the problem by himself or telephone his teacher.

Curriculum Materials

In general terms, most students and home tutors were satisfied with most of the curriculum materials provided for them. Mr Cooke, the home tutor in Case Study 6, for example, said that he found the materials easy to work with because they were systematic and well organised. He appreciated the students' handbook, and the materials on how to time-table for the unit curriculum. The materials, according to Mr Cooke provided "a support system".

A few home tutors, however, expressed concerns with the materials. Three issues were raised: problems with the primary language materials, prescriptiveness, and the academic level of some of the materials.

Language

Several home tutors were critical of the lack of extended writing tasks for upper primary students. Mrs Kelly (Case Study 13), for example, said that there was too much emphasis on oral communication and too little writing for the older children. Kirsty, the governess in Case Studies 10 and 11 was concerned about the amount of writing done by Shaun and Greg. "I might be a bit old fashioned in my view of English," she said, "but to me if you've got a week or two weeks' media units and during that time he really doesn't do any writing ... it kind of just goes by the wayside." When Kirsty spoke to Greg's English teacher about the amount of writing he was doing she was told that she should not insist on more writing:

> Because he was reluctant to write in the first place [the teacher] didn't want him to be doing how shall I put it, to put him off English more I suppose, if he was forced to do a journal writing every day or a story writing or something like that. She thought the compulsion of a journal might just ... so I thought 'Okay, fair enough, if you're happy with what he's producing.'

Several home tutors contrasted the small amount of writing to be done in the upper primary years with the large amount to be done in the junior primary years. Tracey, Emily Baker's governess (Case Study 2) had some reservations about the content of the language program. She was concerned that "there is nothing on all the different genres" in the Year 6 program and there was not enough "real writing":

> It gives them a good range of activities that they can do, and they're interesting ... [but] I think, it would help if each set encouraged some sort of real writing. Like one set she had to write a book, which she did a wonderful job of, you know, she wrote the draft and it was a kid's book, and she illustrated it and made it into a book and she had a wonderful time, and the whole ten days basically were based around this book. You know, this is, all your steps in editing and conferencing and all of that were in this one particular set, but that's the only one up to Set 11.

Whereas only one of Emily's first eleven sets in Year 6 required extended writing, Sarah's (Year 2) materials had "gone to the other extreme". In Tracey's words:

> One of her sets—she's done descriptions and reports and recounts so far—was just so heavy in the two weeks we would have done five descriptions. You know, the first one was a modelling one that I did some and she did some, and then the very next day she was writing the draft of one, and then she did a good copy of one, and then she did another one, and at the end she was totally fed up. 'I'm not doing another description'. She'd see the page, you know, that had all the sections, 'Oh not another one of them!'.

Mrs Kelly (Case Study 13) also expressed concern that there was a "lot of writing" in the junior grades language materials:

> There's a little bit too much actually, especially in the younger grades. Also, I feel that they've just brought in—this must be the third year its been in—they brought in a new language course for Grade 1. They started it off in Grade 1 and then last year Grade 2 was introduced. Next year Grade 3 will be introduced and I personally think that is inappropriate and that's just not only my views either. When I put Vicki back into Grade 1, I started off in Set 7 and I thought maybe it's just me, and then I started talking to a few other mothers and nobody is very happy with it at all, and it sort of came out at the end of the year that none of the kids could read.

Like Mrs Kelly, Mrs Cameron (Case Study 2) found transition to the new junior primary language program particularly difficult. Tracey, the governess in Case Study 4 also found it very hard to ration her time between the older children and the younger child who was working on the whole-language curriculum:

> What's hard is the fact that with Sarah being in Year 2 you can't give as much attention to the other two as they deserve and you sort of find some days you're a step behind them because they've sat down and done, say, the first activity, and then you get in there and read their answer but they're not thinking about that any more and you sort of feel that they could have given a better response but because you haven't been there right at the minute they're writing it or to talk to them about it then you sort of haven't been able to draw everything out for their answer.

These home tutors' experience of the junior primary language curriculum is consistent with the results of an implementation study conducted by Gilmour (1992), who found that a whole-language junior primary program improved students' language outcomes but made much greater demands on the time and effort of students and home tutors.

Prescriptiveness

A second criticism made by several case study participants concerned the prescriptiveness of distance education learning materials. Tracey, the trained teacher who was working as governess for the Baker family (Case Study 2) found the materials made too few allowances for individual differences. In her words:

> Sometimes, you look at the way that they've got it all set out and you think 'This is totally wrong for how she's learning'. With Emily's maths sometimes, I've looked at a page and myself thought 'What on earth are they supposed to be doing here?' so, I get out my book and have a look at the answer and then I look at the question. [I think] 'we'll tackle this one this way'. You end up with the same answer but, some of it's just totally wrong for them.
>
> It might be alright for most of the students but with their individual learning differences you can't expect one prescribed method to work for everyone. You saw the book, it says 'Say this this this', you know, 'The child should do all this' and it doesn't work sometimes. So you just have to read through it and you get an idea of what's meant to be done yourself and then you just follow it yourself but [if I] didn't have the training to think like that, like from uni and stuff, [I'd] probably be saying exactly what's written on that page and they would do it in that exact order.

Another frustration for Tracey, as a trained teacher working in the role of a home tutor, was that she didn't have control over the program. Consequently, there is "nothing to base [her teaching] on" and "no thinking behind" what she does:

> There's nothing really to base it on. Like if I was writing a programme it would be based on the set of standards that you want them to achieve but with this it's all done for you. On the teacher's behalf, there's no thinking behind it. You just have to make sure they get through the work, and make sure that they're understanding what's going on but you sort of can't sit back and think 'Well, this is what they should have achieved by now, can they do it?' You don't have anything like that to go on.

One of the most able and motivated students, Justin Beard (Case Study 3) also expressed concerns about the prescriptiveness of the materials. One concern was that he was locked into a spiral curriculum. Too often, he felt, the materials would "touch on an issue" and them move on too quickly. He would prefer to do something properly the first time rather than continually returning to a more difficult aspect of something he has done before. In the following discussion between Justin and one of the researchers, he elaborated his views:

JUSTIN:	Well they'll touch on an issue and they don't, I think it's just what distance education do, they'll, like say you're doing the area of a triangle, trying to find it and then they'll go and they'll be doing a little bit of algebra, then they'll do something else.
INT:	So they do a little bit of it and then they pick that topic up again later in a more complex way and you don't like that?
JUSTIN:	No. I'd like to sort of stay on it until you learn the whole thing ... a little bit better before they change it.

Although Justin was quite interested in social studies he found the materials annoying because he felt that they often expect him to re-do things he had just learned and understood. In the following transcript Justin explained how he felt he already understood about the rising crime rate in Australia from the notes he had studied and that it was a waste of time having to write about exactly the same things he had just learned:

> Like it says 'Write a page and a half to two page report for a local newspaper on the rising rate of crime in Australia today. Give your article a catchy title so that people will want to read it. In the first section show the rising crime rate is a serious problem in Australia. In the second section discuss some of the more important causes of crime today. In the final section suggest some measures that would help to reduce the rate of crime.' Well, I don't know, it's just that, well people know that there is a serious crime rate and some of the causes of crime today, well they've just gone over it and I've had it

> inside out and all through here and now I've just got to write about. It just makes me...

Justin also expressed concerns about the low conceptual level of some of the materials. When he was asked if he had ever tried to negotiate to do something different when he felt an activity was unnecessary, he responded: "I have but they can't, they haven't really got anything else that I can do apart from the course". Justin's concern about lack of extension material was shared by Dr Douglas, William's home tutor in Case Study 9. Dr Douglas felt that the English and maths programs were "okay, but it doesn't provide for children that might be more intelligent. You know, like the academic extension system." She though that the science materials could be "a bit more advanced" and regarded the social studies course as out of date:

> When you get a distance education program that says, 'The first settlers arrived in 1788', even now, it's an insult. They told me that it was funding. Well I can't see why they can't have a little piece of paper in place to say that the book's old and, we really do understand that Aboriginal people have settled the continent at least forty thousand years before. They could just write a disclaimer in there, they don't have to spend lots of money to do that.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified a series of textual practices followed by distance education students. Not all of these textual practices were used by all of the students all of the time, but together they constitute a set of common reading practices followed by the distance education students we observed in the case studies.

Many of the students read their texts very quickly, and in a very instrumental way. The key reading strategy was *skimming the text for tasks*. Many students read the text only once, ignored supporting or exemplary material, and quickly settled on the task that had to be completed. Often this strategy meant that that they did not complete the task that had actually be asked, or that they did not have a sufficiently strong grasp of the text to complete the task. The second textual strategy was *deciding what is essential*. Students omitted material that was optional, and completed tasks that were to be assessed. The third strategy was to *focus on finishing*. Unlike regular schools, distance education students' work is neatly broken into 10 day sections and they have a very clear idea of what has to be done. The satisfaction of "getting everything over and done with" was reported by many students, including the most successful students. Students also expressed a preference for materials that would allow them to follow the strategy of *going step by step*. They preferred materials that were well set out and broke the materials up into predictable and manageable parts. Their reading practices tended to turn even resolutely non-linear texts into a series of steps to be completed. Distance education students' practical approach to getting through the work was accompanied by a preference for *sticking to the facts*. Students preferred short answer questions, preferred not to

have to give an opinion, and were reluctant to engage in interpretation. More successful students were less likely to fit this profile, but were still reluctant to critique the text or accept that a text may not be correct. The final textual strategy was *getting help* when the text was not easy to understand. All of the students had occasions to seek outside help to understand aspects of the text they were working with. Their strategies ranged from very dependent responses to texts, such as asking for help immediately they did not understand, to independent responses from others who had learned to re-read the text, to "read between the lines", and to save the difficult text until a home tutor was available. One of the characteristics of the more successful students was that they had a range of strategies available to deal with text that they could not understand.

Most home tutors and students had an uncritical attitude towards the distance education texts that were provided for them, and showed little sense that the text themselves might vary in quality. Among the few criticisms voiced by more than one home tutor were comments about the labour-intensiveness of the junior primary language materials, and the limited and mainly narrative writing in the senior primary materials. One home tutor, a trained teacher, regretted that she couldn't see the "thinking behind" some of the work and would have preferred materials that allowed for more individual differences. One able student felt that the materials would "touch on an issue" and then move on too quickly. He also complained about the conceptual level of some of the work and the lack of availability of extension work. One home tutor expressed concerns about the conceptual level, and regarded some of the materials as insulting to Aboriginal people.

One of the mysteries about the relationship between the texts and the task-oriented textual strategies students use is that it is not clear whether the prescriptive texts cause the textual strategies, or the instrumental textual strategies cause the texts to be written as they are. Perhaps the students' instrumental textual behaviour is caused by the characteristics of the texts. Perhaps it works the other way, too. It may be that the texts are written the way they are because distance education teachers and writers have watched their students at work, and have written texts which match students' existing practices. Whether the texts cause the practices or the practices cause the texts, however, it seems to have led to a tight circle which has serious consequences for the openness of students' learning. Students learn to work quickly, to look for the text in bold, and to stick to the facts. Most of the distance education students we watched worked energetically and purposefully through their sets, showing more self-reliance than we would expect from students in regular classrooms. What distance education students seemed to miss, however, is the more critical and ambiguous aspects of text analysis which are essential for success in the higher levels of the humanities and social sciences.

CHAPTER 4
TECHNOLOGY

Chapter 3 provided an account of the use students made of the printed materials which form the basis of most of the distance learning encountered in this study. For some students, however, the printed materials are supplemented by telephones, air lessons, computers and other media. Of these other media, the telephone was the most frequently used form of technology. Figure 2 shows the percentages of students in all categories who made use of various technologies to do their schoolwork. The telephone was used by most students in the country category and referrals category, and computers were used by two thirds of country children; but most other methods were rarely used.

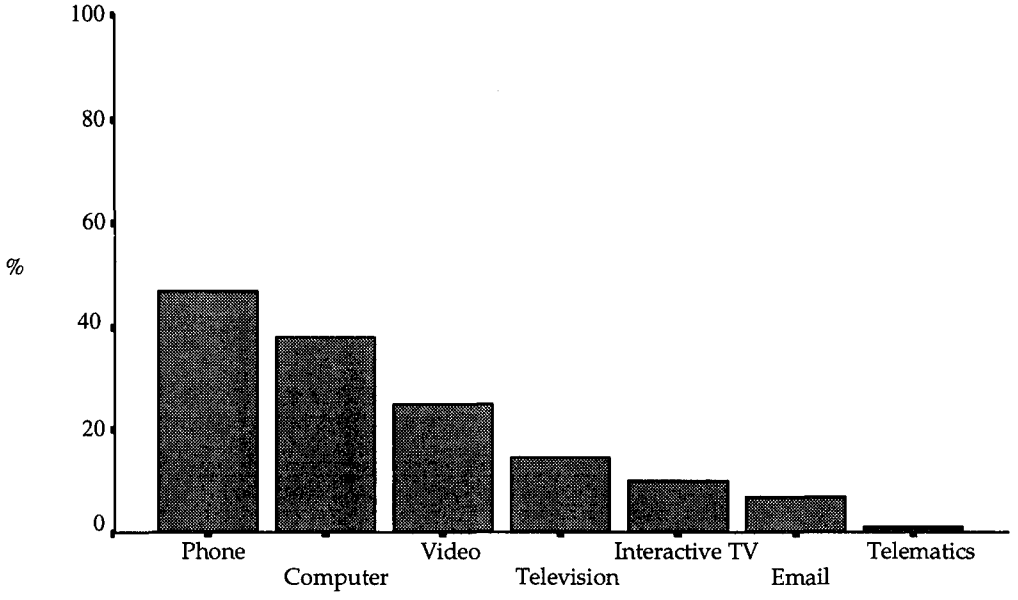

Figure 2. **Percentage of respondents in each category who used various kinds of equipment for their schoolwork**

Telephone

The language and learning survey indicated that most students did not telephone their teacher until all other options were exhausted. When they found their school work difficult, the rank order of the strategies they used was: keep trying to do the work by themselves, read the text book, ask somebody else at home for help, ask their home tutor and, finally, telephone their teacher. These results are shown in Figure 3.

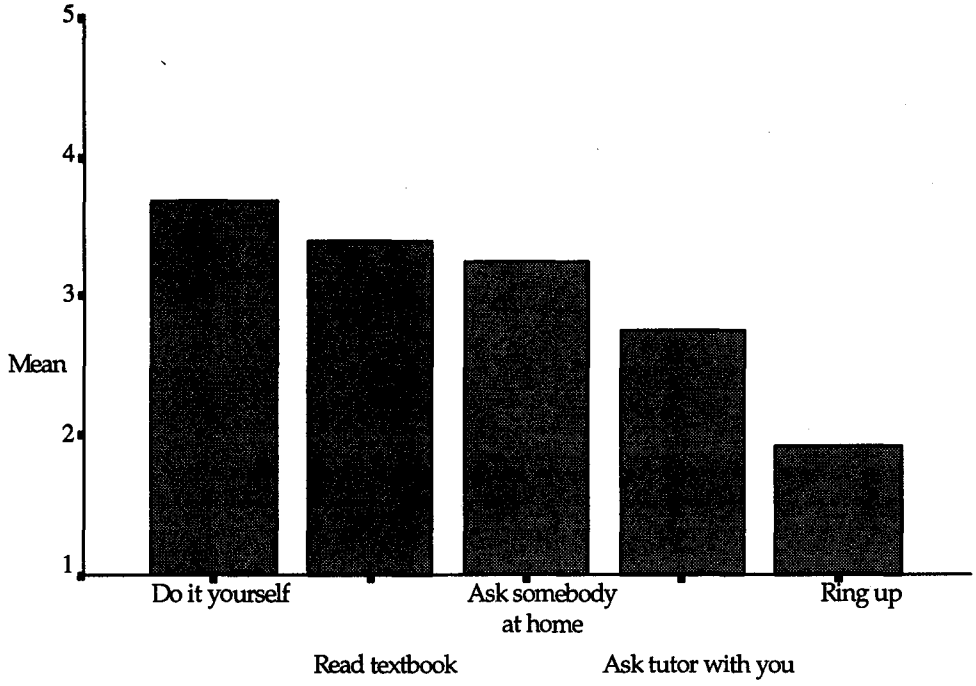

Figure 3. **Mean rankings of actions taken when respondents found schoolwork difficult**

This pattern tended to be true of all categories, the main differences between categories being that overseas students were less likely to phone their teacher than other students; and adults, travellers, and referrals rarely asked help from a teacher or tutor who was with them, presumably because these groups had least access to tutors. Several parents wrote comments indicating that their children preferred to work independently as far as possible and ask their parents for help only when they could go no further by themselves. The option of phoning a teacher is apparently not always feasible: One parent wrote: "We can not ring the teacher and ask for help, while we are outside WA (008 No. Does not apply, and it's too expensive for us). It would be very helpful if we could occasionally."

Among the families involved in the case study investigations, there was a wide range of patterns of telephone use. All of the families made some use of the telephone. Fewer of the families with experienced home tutors or governesses used the telephone for assistance with lessons. For example, Tracey, the trained teacher who was governess for Emily Baker (Case 2) said she would telephone the school occasionally if the radio reception of an air lesson had been too poor to follow, or before a home visit to ask the teacher to bring out some books for Emily. Her most common reasons for calling the school were to do with materials: books to be sent out to the property, computer paper required, or learning materials with missing pages. Emily confirmed this, when she said she would use the telephone "if we've got a problem with the computer or the radio, things like that, or if you're not quite sure what to do or if we haven't got any books." Similar patterns of telephone use about were reported by David Cooke (Case Study 6), Sophie Dansie (Case Study 8), and Greg and Shaun Jacobs (Case Studies 10 and 11).

In some other families, the telephone was used much more frequently. Mrs Kelly, (Case Study 13) said that she had a lot of contact with the school. "We've got a 008 number," she said, and "I'm always on it". Stephanie Kelly talked by telephone to the teachers "about once a week" and guessed that her mother made contact "about 10 times a day".

Justin's Phone Calls

One of the students who made frequent use of the telephone was Justin Beard (Case Study 5). When he couldn't solve a problem his first strategy was to ask his mother, a teacher, for help. If she was not able to resolve the difficulty he would ring his teacher in Perth. However this did not always enable him to get a full understanding of the solution so he sometimes needed to refer the issue on to his tutor.

Justin found the telephone calls to his teachers in Perth were often better for dealing with organisational difficulties than for clarification of ideas. During the time we spent with him he made a phone call to his maths teacher which very successfully helped him plan his maths program for the remainder of the year. The teacher asked where Justin was up to, discussed how much work he was going to complete during semester two and checked whether or not his working rate was fast enough to achieve his goal. She then explained the arrangements for completing work at the end of the year. The following excerpt from that conversation shows how the teacher negotiated the end of year marking and checked Justin's working rate:

TEACHER:	There's another three weeks after that, we still take work and mark it but it means that your result, you don't get the bit of paper until next year. It actually gives you some extra time to keep going and finish it. It would be good if you could finish it this year.
JUSTIN:	I definitely will yeah. Because I've been working a book a week and I've got seven weeks next term and I should be able to do it then.
TEACHER:	Oh, if you're going through a book a week it should fit perfectly. I worked that out for somebody else.
JUSTIN:	Yeah, yeah.
TEACHER:	How's it going?
JUSTIN:	Oh it's going good. Yeah, I like doing that bit more work in that other text book as well. That's been pretty good.

Justin was very satisfied with this telephone conversation and said, "Yeah, I've got it all, the work with me now, so that's great. Yeah, I'm up to date so that's good".

When he used the telephone to try and resolve two more complex learning problems with his teachers, he did not feel nearly as satisfied with the outcome of the conversations—even though he was able to continue with his work. On the first of these occasions he was having trouble understanding the instructions about a diagram and experiment in electronics. He could not find certain parts of a dry cell which were named in the text. The teacher told him "you've just got to use your initiative on that one. It's a very bad question". So Justin moved on to the next problem, which related to being unable to find, in his resource box, a switch which was referred to in the text as though he were required to make use of it. The teacher explained that he did not need the switch to do the experiment because the switch was mentioned merely to show the need for a control device—yet the text was quite unclear about it. The discussion resolved the problem to some extent but left Justin feeling confused because he did not really understand the explanation provided. In this extract from the conversation, notice how Justin told the teacher about his confusion and then gave up on the issue:

JUSTIN:	Okay. With that experiment, the above one, was there, I think we had everything except we don't have a switch.
TEACHER:	The switch?
JUSTIN:	Yeah.
TEACHER:	What do you want a switch for?
JUSTIN:	Well in question 1, page 11, it says 'on the diagram switch'.
TEACHER:	You won't need it for the experiment though. Okay?
JUSTIN:	Okay, thanks. It's just a bit confusing.
TEACHER:	But if you have that sort of a system, you've got to have an input, a control and an output but basically the input is the electricity, all right?
JUSTIN:	Okay.
TEACHER:	The control is the switch and that the switch is mentioned is to show you that there is a control there and that's the control device, your switch. Okay?
JUSTIN:	Okay, yeah, it's just a bit confusing.
TEACHER:	All right? No other problems?

He was dissatisfied when he finished the phone call and continued discussing the question with the researcher in an effort to clarify it for himself. During this discussion he explained how he had done similar experiments in science. By talking about what he had done previously, he satisfied himself about the meaning of the text.

Another example of Justin's use of the telephone was when he was trying to complete a maths problem in which the diagram was out of proportion and unclear. He was being asked to find whether or not triangles were similar to one another. He decided to ask his mother for help. After quite a lengthy conversation his mother asked him to show her an example from the book which she could copy. This did not help very much however, so she suggested Justin call his teacher. Justin rang up his teacher who was not available, but when he persisted he was given assistance by one of the other teachers. He showed considerable maturity in the way he negotiated to get the assistance of another teacher. The teacher began explaining how the diagram gave an invalid picture of the problem, but then when she had difficulty explaining the problem she resorted to telling him how to answer it. Notice the confusion in the exchange below and the way the teacher resolved it by providing the answer:

TEACHER:	It's a diagram, so, I mean you're looking at the diagram, and yes it does look bigger but you don't take note of that.
JUSTIN:	It won't matter that in your setting out you will have TV over VU equals SU over TV ...
TEACHER:	Slow down a little bit. You've got TV ...
JUSTIN:	No sorry TU over VU.
TEACHER:	Mm.
JUSTIN:	Equals SU over TU. It won't matter that you're repeating yourself. There will also be in here (inaudible) ST over TV.
TEACHER:	Well why don't you, I'll give you Y over 7 equals 10 over 4 equals 4 over x is what you should have.
JUSTIN:	Y over 7 equals 4 over x equals 10 over TU.
INT:	7.
TEACHER:	l0 over 4.
JUSTIN:	10 over 4.
TEACHER:	Okay, can you work it from there?
JUSTIN:	Yes, right.

After the conversation was concluded Justin commented, "It helps you to get it right but she didn't really explain". Justin is a responsible, self monitoring student who found it quite frustrating when he could not get a satisfactory explanation to his problems. Despite his vigorous and appropriate use of the telephone to follow up learning difficulties, these two examples drawn from the same school day show that the telephone is an imperfect learning tool. In the science example he was told that his problem was due to a fault in the text and he left the conversation still confused; in the mathematics example, he was provided with the answer but not with an explanation he could understand.

Much more successful was his earlier use of the telephone to manage organisational problems.

Air Lessons

Four of the case study students were enrolled in distance education through schools of the air. For all of these students, air lessons were the highlight of the day. Emily Baker (Case Study 2) said that air lessons were her favourite lessons because they gave her the opportunity of "talking to my friends [and] sometimes to have a conversation with them." She also liked answering questions and giving her opinions. These views were echoed by Miranda Rourke (Case Study 15), who said one of the things she liked about air lessons was that they increased the range of opinions she heard on topics related to school work. "I can get Mum's opinion," she said, but with air lessons, "I can get other people's opinions":

> I look forward to them because I can talk to people and get other people's opinions ... kids and everything. It's sort of nice because I like hearing what other people say.

Air lessons are conducted as a series of two-way conversations between the teacher and a student, all of which are overheard by the whole class. The teacher speaks, sometimes in a monologue and sometimes to a particular student. Teachers signal that their turns are over by asking a question and then saying "over". The student who is chosen then takes a turn which also ends with the word "over". While this elaborate turn-taking routine is followed, the other students in the class listen to the dialogue. During every air lesson we observed, students listened with great attention, no matter how poor the radio reception was on the day. Whenever there was an air lesson on, everyone else in the room tended to listen in, whether it was their air lesson or not. Home tutors, too, listened closely to air lessons, checking that they knew the answers to the material which the children were working on, assisting the children with the answers they give over the air, and making silent judgements about the teacher's handling of the class and the content of the lesson.

Because air lessons are such an unusual form of educational technology and are such a popular part of primary distance education students' learning, several air lessons are described in detail below.

Sophie's Air Lesson

One of many air lessons we heard was Sophie Dansie's lesson on weather in Year 7 science (Case Study 8). Like all air lessons, Sophie's lesson began with a greeting, a description of the materials the children would require for the lesson, and a few minutes of music while the children got ready for the lesson. The opening section of Sophie's science lesson appears in the transcript below:

> TEACHER: Good morning Year 7s. Today you'll need your year book for science as well as your kit, your

weather maps from your kit. Okay, talk to you shortly, some music first. *(Music, 2 minutes)* Good morning once again Year 7s. And we have a science weather lesson today and let's just check our roll and see if everybody is out there this morning. First of all to you Sophie. How are you Sophie? Any news for us today, over?

SOPHIE: Good morning Mr Hay and everyone else and I'm very well thank you. I've got some news here today and how are you, over?

TEACHER: Oh, I'm pretty good and, ah, go ahead with your news Sophie, over.

SOPHIE: Oh well yesterday (the school principal) and Bill came out for a bit of a home visit and yesterday afternoon we went out to the old homestead and looked around for odds and ends for my archaeology project, and then we went down the river and we did some archery and I was the only one that close to the target. I got the red bit next to the centre, over.

For each child, the same ritual was repeated: welcome, a question about news, and some small personal comment addressed to the child. The teacher then checked to see that children all had the book open on the right page and he began working through the activities they were supposed to have completed in the activity book. The next section of the lesson went like this:

TEACHER: I'll ask you Sophie, you might have done this. Have you done pages 7 to 9 after those questions Sophie about different weather forecasts for different days, over?

SOPHIE: Yes I have, over.

TEACHER: Okay. Has anyone not done that yet, over? Okay what I'll do, we'll just quickly run through that and I'll just ask different people what different answers that they had for that. On the first page on Lesson One on page 7 and it said the forecast was going to be 42, fine and hot with gusty easterly, extreme fire danger and outlook continuing hot and the current temperature 29, when you first wake up in the morning. So it's pretty hot. Describe the clothes you'd wear for that one. I'll work up the roll this time. Describe the clothes you'd wear for a day like that, over.

The book provided space for students to write a series of two-line responses to questions such as "having heard the forecast, describe the clothes you would wear". One by one, moving up the roll from the bottom of the list, the teacher

asked each child a question. When the questions listed in the text had been answered, the teacher asked whether any of the class had any answers that were "unusual or that you'd like to inform us about." Sophie responded by reading out two of her answers, and the teacher added some detail of his own. He then indicated that the class should turn to the next page in their books, and said that he would go through the next set of questions from "the top of the roll". By the time it was Sophie's turn again, the question in the text was, "How do other members of your family react when it has been raining non-stop for two weeks?"

SOPHIE:	Well unfortunately this has never happened to us and we'd feel perfect, over.
TEACHER:	I was going to say I bet it's never happened out there. What's the most rain you've ever had, days in a row over?
MRS DANSIE:	(*Who is sitting listening in to the air lesson, says to Sophie*) That heavy rain.
SOPHIE:	Oh well, we had that heavy rain, overnight we got a hundred and sixteen mls over.

On a content level, this lesson on weather patterns could be mistaken for a very simple set of learning activities. The tasks in the science set are not very complex for Year 7 students: presumably, much younger children than Sophie actually know what it is like when it is hot for a long time or wet for a long time. Moreover, the students in this class had already completed the task in writing before the air lesson began. But to focus on the content of the lesson alone would be to miss much of what was important about the air lesson as a support for distance learning.

One of the things missing in the bald transcript of the air lesson is what the children who were *not* speaking were doing. As the teacher worked his way up and down the roll asking questions, Sophie listened intently, giving the answers to the questions aloud to herself and her mother. Later in the lesson, for example, when the teacher asked Holly "What is happening in Darwin?", Sophie answered to herself, "Raining." Similarly, when the teacher asked "Does anyone know what wind speed is measured in?" Sophie turned to Mrs Dansie and said "Kilometres?" Mrs Dansie shook her head as if to say, "No." Sophie then suggested "Knots?" and Mrs Dansie nodded. When Sophie knew she had the right answer, she pressed the talk button on the microphone, but was not called on to answer. When it was Sophie's turn to respond on air, she rehearsed the answer with Mrs Dansie before committing herself. For example, when the teacher asked the question, "Who makes the weather forecast, Sophie?", Sophie looked at Mrs Dansie and asked "Bureau of Meteorology?" When Mrs Dansie nodded, Sophie turned back to the transceiver and gave the same answer to the teacher.

A second element of the air lesson obscured by a transcript of the teacher's question and answer session is the social context of the air lesson. Sophie regarded all of the other children in her class as friends, and she listened

carefully to what they had to say. Even though the air lesson is structured around a set of two-way communications between the teacher and individual children, the experience of participating in the air lesson is very similar to participation in a regular class. To sit in the school room beside a student doing air lessons was to be in a "virtual" classroom. Through the ebb and flow of the conversation, an imaginary classroom was created in the air. It felt real enough to touch. While air lessons were on, everyone in the room listened in and followed the conversation. For Sophie, it was quite clear that she was not just having a two-way conversation with her teacher. "The whole class is there, definitely," she said. Air lessons were more interesting, she thought, than regular work on the sets and they taught her "a lot more than you would if you just read a book or something":

> If you're on [the regular distance education program] you don't see your teacher and you don't hear the teacher and you don't see all your other classmates unless you go on camp, and that's kind of like you're isolated, but when you've got the radio you don't feel so isolated.

Miranda's Air Lesson

One of the advantages of well written distance education materials is that they scaffold learning tasks very carefully, perhaps more carefully than many teachers can manage to achieve day after day in the hurly-burly of a class of thirty children. The section of the health education text covered in Miranda Rourke's air lesson (Case Study 15) carefully illustrated a series of physical changes and the emotional consequences of puberty for children. This scaffold was brought to life by the school of the air teacher as she moved down the roll, asking each child a question about each aspect of change. An extended account of Miranda's air lesson appears in Case Study 15.

There are several important ways in which Miranda's air lesson added value to the health education text which other distance education students would have been working through on their own and in silence. One aspect of the teacher's added value was that she explicitly stated the objective of the lesson. This is a useful step in regular lessons, but it may be even more important for distance education students whose focus on completing the task in their sets is sometimes greater than their attention to the learning outcomes of the lesson.

The teacher also made good use of her knowledge of the circumstances of the children's lives. When she asked children to identify examples of changes, she already had some changes in mind ("I know ... you've lost your horse and your grandfather," she said to Miranda). The teacher also knew about some of the challenges which would be facing children, such as Miranda, who would be boarding away from home next year ("next year you are going to need to find a few other people"). She was experienced in working with children of this age, and able to connect the lesson to common experiences ("you can probably all reach the lolly jar where Mum puts it"). She also had the knack, which comes from experience, of finding a way of talking about the physical changes which the boys and girls share ("Who's ... feeling a bit gangly now?"),

rather than focusing on the male and female differences which might come more readily to mind for twelve-year-olds.

In addition to this assistance with the content of the health lesson, the teacher also provided an organisational structure designed to help students and home tutors to complete the lessons. She began the air lesson with a series of reminders about materials needed for coming lessons, and she gave an extra reminder to children who had not read the study guide ("You will need to have watched it for next week's lesson, Miranda"). As she ended the lesson she instructed children to make a note in the "follow up" section of their diaries about what to do for homework, and she reminded them about the materials needed for tomorrow's language lesson.

Emily's Air Lesson

One of the consequences of distance education generally and air lessons in particular seems to be that teachers are very explicit to students about the teaching and learning program. In Miranda's air lesson, the teacher is very clear about the topic, the page she is working from, and the home-work requirements. Students, consequently, learn to be very explicit about their teachers' intentions, as a discussion with Emily Baker (Case Study 2) demonstrated. When Emily sat down for her air lesson on health, she knew what topic she would be working on ("dangers around the house"), what was the last activity in her last health lesson ("what could be wrong in this kitchen or garage"), what her homework was ("we got these from the pictures on page 8"), and whether or not the activity was completed ("we couldn't get through it all"). She correctly predicted where in the text the teacher would begin ("page 10"), what she would do ("we just discuss them"), and what pages she would be working on ('she'll be talking about page 11 and 12"). Many children in regular classes, of course, are attentive to the teacher, but few would be better informed than Emily about what work has come before, what will come up today, and what work there still is in the future.

Computers

Fewer than 40% of the families responding to the survey had access to a computer for the students' school work. Nine of the fifteen case study students (60%) had access to a computer, including all four of the school of the air students. Of these students, Sophie Dansie (Case Study 8) seemed to be the most accomplished user of the computer. Mrs Dansie was impressed at how quickly the children had "picked up" computer use. She, too, had become comfortable with using the computer and had found a few business and household tasks it could help her with. She attributed the success of computer use among school of the air families to "the way school has introduced it", but acknowledged that there are "a few families where the mums won't have anything to do with it."

Mrs Kelly (Case Study 13), for example, described the computer as "the dreaded computer" and "a time waster". Working with the computer was a burden in this household. Although the unit was solar powered "it often runs

out of power and you have to go down to the lighting plant. It all takes time". In several other families on pastoral properties, use of the computer supplied by the school was also limited by practical considerations. Peta Cameron (Case Study 4) had the opportunity to do her school work on the computer and send it straight to her teacher by modem, but for some time did not use it because the telephone outlet was not in an appropriate position. Now they have moved the telephone outlet so that Peta can use the modem, but the computer cannot be used until midday when the generator is turned on, and by that time the school day is usually over. Similarly, Emily Baker (Case Study 2) had the option of sending her language work in to school by modem, but continued to do most of her work on paper. Emily explained that this was the case because "the motor doesn't go on in the morning and we usually finish (school) in the morning."

Although computers were widely used by students in case studies families, they were usually used for word processing. One exception was in one of the schools of the air, where a teacher had transferred some of the language skills activities from sets to computer files, and students completed their language work on computer and submitted it by modem. The one example of this work seen during the case study data collection was in Case Study 15. When it was time for Mrs Rourke to test Miranda's spelling, Miranda typed her answers on the computer and then sounded the spelling back to Mrs Rourke. The nature of the work, however, was the same as if Miranda had been writing her spelling with a pen, as the following section of transcript shows:

MRS ROURKE: ... do these ones first, destruction (pause, 20 seconds).
MIRANDA: D-e-s-t-r-u-c-t-i-o-n.
MRS ROURKE: Yep, written.
MIRANDA: W-r-i-t-t-e-n.
MRS ROURKE: Yes, secretary, it's in your book.
MIRANDA: Oh, s-e-c-r-a-t-a-r-y.
MRS ROURKE: That's not right.
MIRANDA: Hang on (pause 10 seconds) is it e-t-a-r-y?
MRS ROURKE: Start again.
MIRANDA: S-e-c-r-e-t-a-r-y.
MRS ROURKE: Right, permanently.
MIRANDA: Per-man-en (pause 25 seconds)
MRS ROURKE: (inaudible)
MIRANDA: Yeah, per-man, on, per-man, per-man,
MRS ROURKE: Nearly.
MIRANDA: P-e-r-m-a-n-e-n-t-l-y.
MRS ROURKE: Yeah, library. Write it down, library.
MIRANDA: What about the other one?
MRS ROURKE: It's got a trick in it, um, hey?

MIRANDA: (inaudible)
MRS ROURKE: You've got to put the 'r' in it.
MIRANDA: Library.

The Jacobs family (Case Studies 10 and 11) found their computer to be very useful. Greg was sent a computer when he was doing business studies with the school. Kirsty, the governess, used the computer to make comments on Shaun's and Greg's work, and to write to their teachers. Shaun enjoyed using the computer and Kirsty indicated that his English work had improved markedly since he had been working on the computer. Shaun, too, thought the computer had made a difference.

Mrs Jacobs was surprised that more of the boys' school work was not done on the computer. A similar comment may be made about Troy Proctor (Case Study 14), who was interested in computers but made less use of his computer than he might have done. Troy had a computer in his room but no printer, so he was not able to print out his school work on the computer. He had no modem either, so he was unable to forward his work directly to his teachers from his computer.

Other Media

Only one telematics lessons was observed during the case study research. On the day we visited Justin Beard (Case Study 5), the Year 6 and 7 students in his school were involved in a French lesson using telematics. Since the computer and the "hands free" telephone were kept in Justin's room the researcher was present during the lesson. Justin took an interest in the children's work and assisted a number of them by getting materials for them. There were some difficulties establishing contact with the other children in the telematics class in the initial part of the lesson, after which the teacher greeted all of the children in French. She then attempted to work with a program on the computer but there were technical difficulties which prevented this from occurring. The teacher was then forced to improvise, so she asked the children to continue with a photo story which they were going to complete for submission. This entailed much rushing around on the part of the children to get paper, glue and their photograph. The teacher instructed the children how to write their photo story. This was a complex task so most of the instructions were given in English. Time ran out very quickly, so the teacher exchanged farewells in French and the lesson was concluded without any further opportunity for the children to speak French. Obviously telematics offers a wonderful resource for such lessons provided the technology does not fail.

Justin also commented on several other communications media. In several practical subjects he would have appreciated video support for activities. As he said, "I found tech drawing really difficult to do without anybody showing me. They didn't even do a video demonstrating lesson. That was really hard." His mother, Mrs Beard, made a similar comment:

> Two other problems [have] arisen, one with woodwork and the other was with tech drawing. Now both of those things are pretty hard, especially the tech drawing. Because I had no background in it, it's not something that you could do over the phone and so basically he scraped through that unit and then dropped it because he just couldn't understand it. And really there should have been some sort of video. I mean I'm getting off the track a bit here but there should have been, I mean a video would have been so easy to do just to get the basics of the tech drawing.

Justin was very supportive of the interactive television programs available in some other subjects. He gave the example of *Live Science* which made science more interesting and easier to understand. He thought that the science program was well set out, interesting and did a good job of linking the science concepts to relevant issues in his life:

> Like they were discussing the option of atomic energy and things like that and they really made it seem relevant to you whereas this is different this one, but they could be linking this to something that was relevant as well.

The value of educational television was not universally supported in the case studies. Sophie Dansie's mother (Case Study 8), for example, was aware of *Live Science* but chose not to have the children watch it:

> We've never really watched *Live Science*. It's available here. If the school were to say you should watch such and such we probably would get it. We've got a publication there with the weekly programs. I'm in such a routine now that anything like that puts me out and I think "if they watch an hour of *Live Science* it's an hour you've got to do in the afternoon or something".

Mrs Dansie said that she would be much more likely to make use of television programs if they were structured into the sets her children were doing. This had been the case, she said, with some computing programs which had been integrated into sets.

Conclusion

Five forms of technological support for distance learning were encountered during the qualitative data collection for this study: telephone support, air lessons, computers, telematics and interactive television. Of these five forms, the most frequently encountered were the use of telephones and air lessons. The air lessons were universally regarded as useful, even thought there were problems with poor radio reception from time to time. Air lessons supported print-based distance learning in a variety of ways. They increased the already high levels of students' explicit understanding of the teaching and learning program, provided opportunities for students to rehearse their answers to teachers' questions, provided a social context for physically isolated students'

learning, connected the learning with individual student's lives, and supported students to complete their written set work. These observations support earlier conclusions about the role of air lessons in helping students "cope with the effects of isolation" (Mountford, Cottam, Kirby, Zubrinich, Webster, Harvey, Smith, & Speight, 1986, p. 6).

In contrast with air lessons, the evidence about telephone use was much more ambiguous. Telephones were the most frequently used form of technology, proving especially useful in supporting the organisation of distance learning. The survey data suggested that telephone calls to teachers were used as a last resort when students confronted learning difficulties. As the case studies made clear, this was not universally so. Some families made very frequent use of the telephone for both learning and organisational assistance. However, the phone calls to teachers that we recorded were more successful in solving organisational problems than learning problems.

Computers were widely used in this study: 40% of students responding to the survey had the use of a computer, as did 60% of the case study students. Computers had been implemented very successfully in some contexts, allowing for speedy submission of work by modem, but the use of computers was plainly in its infancy compared with the use of telephones and air lessons. Use of computers tended to reproduce the same text forms as the written texts students were using, and were made less effective than they might have been by inexperience, by patterns of power availability on pastoral stations, and by incomplete sets of equipment.

The use of telematics and interactional television was also in its infancy, prone to technical failure, and incompletely integrated into written set work. The more thoroughly new technology is integrated into set work, as air lessons are in schools of the air, the more likely it is to be valued and used by home tutors. New technology will no doubt improve distance education as it is more widely introduced, but there seems to be a long and steep learning curve. Some home tutors remain sceptical about technology, arguing that "money into technology is not necessarily the answer" and that "technology is great, if it works." In the mean time, it seems likely that more educational use could be made of the humble and widely available telephone.

CHAPTER 5
SUPERVISION

This chapter explores the patterns of supervision experienced by distance education students. It includes a description of students' school hours and time-tables, their relationships with schools and teachers, and an account of the range of supervision roles adopted by home tutors. Five overlapping roles are distinguished, using the case study data: home tutors as *supervisor, teacher, mentor, co-learner,* and *parent*. Some home tutors work in many of these roles as appropriate to their children's needs, and others find themselves restricted to just one or two of the possible supervision roles. This chapter also provides an account of the different patterns of supervision experienced by older and younger students, and describes the impact of feedback and assessment of distance education students.

School hours and time-tables

According to the adult form of the language and learning survey most students, and particularly country and overseas students, were supervised every day (Figure 4).

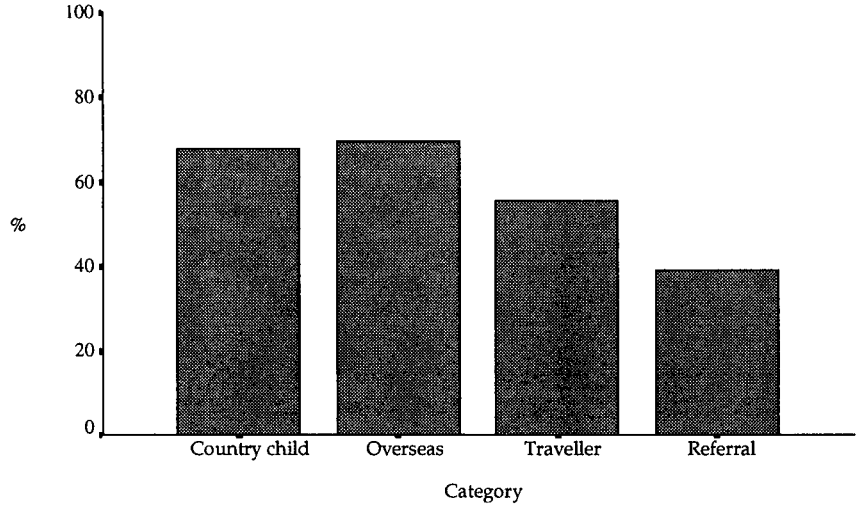

Figure 4. **Percentages respondents in each category who were supervised every day**

These results from the adult survey provide a higher estimate of adult supervision than the students' survey. When students were asked about adult supervision, many of students reported that they completed their distance education work by themselves, unattended by an adult. Figure 5 indicates that about half of the respondents were supervised by an adult "half the time or less". More than 40% of students in the country and travellers categories and more than 60% of the students in the overseas and referral categories, reported that they worked unattended "most of the time or always".

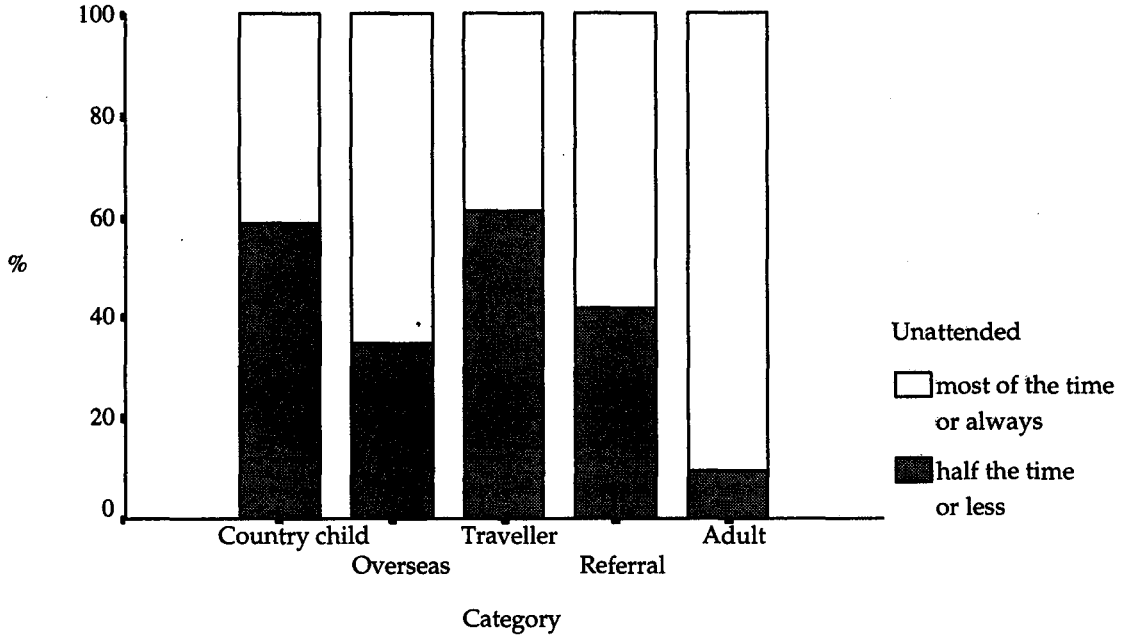

Figure 5. **Percentages of respondents in each category who work unattended by an adult**

Students who had been referred to distance education for social or health reasons tended to be less closely supervised—18% indicating that they were "never supervised". Whether supervised by an adult or not, 80% of country and overseas students had regular timetables, over half of travellers; most referrals and adults did not. Country and overseas students spent more time on school work (mean 5.7 hours) than travellers (mean 4.3 hours) and referral students (mean 4.2 hours). Students were usually supervised by mothers; fewer than 20% were supervised by a paid tutor or teacher.

In the case studies, primary students worked under closer supervision than secondary students. Primary-aged students working on pastoral stations tended to start school early in the day, especially when the weather was hot, and often finished their school work by noon or earlier. Most primary students worked to a fixed time-table under the supervision of a home tutor. Stephanie Kelly (Case Study 13), for example, began school at 6.30 AM and followed a set timetable for the school day. Language and mathematics were scheduled for the first two hours. Mrs Kelly considered these to be the "most difficult subjects", best done while the children were fresh. After smoko the children worked on their other subjects until the end of school, at about 11.00 or 11.30 . The school year on such properties also tended to be influenced by the annual rhythm of climate and station work-load. In Mrs Kelly's case, the children worked over weekends in order to have the lessons finished by Melbourne Cup day in early November. Other home tutors altered the time-table to fit in with mustering or trips to town.

Like Stephanie, most of the primary students worked according to time-tables set by their home tutors. Others such as Emily Baker (Case Study 2) and Miranda Rourke (Case Study 15) worked regular hours, but made their own plans about which subjects were completed in which order. Emily's daily routine of school, for example, was determined by the schedule of air lessons. Her day began when the first of her sisters' air lessons began. After smoko they would work until about noon. "Most days we get finished by twelve," her governess Tracey said. If there was an afternoon air lesson, they would go back in to the school room in the afternoon. The older children fitted their mathematics and language work around the air lesson time-table. As Tracey explained, "it's better for them, I think, if they can decide what they want to do and in which order".

Although Emily and her sisters had some choice about the order in which they worked on mathematics and language, they had to follow a plan of activities which Tracey drew up for each set of work. She adopted this practice because she found the children were missing out too many of the activities in each set. In her words:

> In the first few weeks that I was here, I didn't know very much about it all, and we'd get to the end of the set and I'd pick up all these activities that they hadn't done. They didn't think they had to, or they hadn't read it properly or whatever. So they, usually, they will read it. The problem is with most of these they don't read the instructions and (later realise) 'Oh we have to do this, I better read this'.

William Douglas (Case Study 9) was the most independent of the primary students in the case studies. He usually started work as soon as he had eaten his breakfast. As he explained, "I woke up this morning and Mum was down at the paddock, so I just have my breakfast and pull on my clothes, walk down to see that Paul is there ... and then I came down and started on my work." He planed his timetable and organised his work himself. He usually spent half of the morning on mathematics and the other half on language, and then he worked on health, art and social studies in the afternoons. He preferred to work on one of the afternoon subjects until he completed the required work for two weeks and then he would then move on to the next subject. At the time we visited him, he had completed all of his science so he did not need to include this in his planning. During morning and afternoon breaks, he checked his work with his mother and completed any of the work which was supposed to be discussed with his home tutor.

Secondary-aged students tended to start later and work longer school hours than the primary students we met. Some of these students worked according to a time-table established for them by an adult, and others set their own time-tables. Unlike most of the primary school students involved in distance education, most of the secondary students had extensive experience of regular face-to-face schooling. Among the secondary students in the case studies, only Greg Jacobs had completed primary school by distance education.

According to Justin Beard (Case Study 3), learning to organise his own work was one of the most difficult aspects of transferring from a regular school to distance education. "My first semester when I first started here in Year 8 was pretty hard going because it was the first time I'd done anything like this and it was quite hard," he said. Fortunately, he had a lot of support from a tutor who spent one morning a week with him. She helped him work out his timetable each week and then worked through any problems he had in the previous week's work. Even with this support he had found it difficult to manage his time. "They don't really give you enough information on how much time you should spend on each subject," he said. "I mean, they tell you that you need to finish a book in a fortnight but you sort of have to regulate it". Justin had a very clear overview of the structures of all of his subjects and the relationships between his regional co-ordinator, his tutor, his distance education teachers and his mother as the home tutor. He was able to explain the function of each of these people with great clarity. He also has a very good understanding of his timetable and school program.

The longer students had worked on distance education, the more independent many of them had become. David Cooke's father (Case Study 6), for example, noted that he had to sit with David "less and less" as his motivation and results improved through distance education:

> When he first started, over twelve months ago, I sat with him and it had to be a constant 100% being there to get him to work because his mental approach was that he didn't want to do anything ... [Now] I can walk out of the room and leave him to do a day's maths without the supervision, and I would come back, yes and he'd done it. You know, that sort of thing has just evolved and ah, I think over the twelve months that has gradually increased in other subject areas too.

Others among the secondary students have more difficulty keeping to a routine. James Camisa (Case Study 5), for example, sometimes worked in a shade-cloth room on his parents' prospecting lease, and sometimes worked on the front verandah or in the lounge room of their house in town. James thought that he completed more work when he was at the "block", because there were fewer distractions out there. He tried to spend 45 minutes on each subject during the day, beginning with the core subjects. "We do four major ones each morning," his mother said. "We try and do the options in the afternoon which we are way, way behind in." For the first few months of this year, while the family was at the block, James had been able to keep to his routine. However, when his mother had to go to Perth in the middle of the year the timetable had been interrupted and James fell behind in his units of work.

The secondary student who worked with the least supervision of all was a referral student, Daphne Jekich (Case Study 12). Daphne worked four days a week at home by herself and one day a week at school. She spent about six and a half hours each day on her studies, sometimes more. She did not have a regular timetable but she made sure the required work was completed. School

work was a priority and leisure activities were of secondary importance, to be fitted in "around my schoolwork". Her attitude to school and learning style had changed since she has been studying by distance education. When she was at a regular school her friends were a higher priority than her school work, but working on distance education was "a lot different". Unlike regular school work, her distance education work had "got to be done".

Relationships with Schools and Teachers

Five of the case study students, including two who were in the "referral" category and three who were in the "country" category had a history of conflict with regular teachers and schools. For these students, distance education was characterised by better relationships than their school learning experience. Troy Proctor's mother (Case Study 14) believed that regular schooling did not provide for children who do not fit into the system with ease, and she had been afraid that "he would end up without an education at the end of his schooling." She explained that Troy had been a premature baby and suffered considerable trauma at birth. Despite his apparent natural aptitude for many things the doctors had warned her that he was likely to have some problems and she had always felt there were aspects of learning which were particularly difficult for him. He was able to read and write when he began school but regular schooling "was a nightmare from day one". Mrs Proctor believed that Troy had a perceptual problem, but his teachers felt he had considerable talent and just needed to be pushed along. She explained this as follows:

MRS PROCTOR: Teachers, they all make that comment that he is not doing as well as he should be because they could see the potential. I had one say to me that he should be at the top of the class.

INT: I suppose it's hard when you're teaching a bright child with potential not to be trying to get him up to where they perceive he could be, isn't it?

MRS PROCTOR: Except they should try and listen. I kept saying to them 'All right the reasons will be because the doctors have assured [me] that he will have problems', but they all said the same sort of thing that 'oh that was a very long time ago.' You know, 'why should it still affect him today?'

Eventually Troy became so miserable at school that she asked for a full medical assessment to be done. This indicated that Troy had some minor perceptual problems which may have made it difficult for him to understand school tasks in the context of a large group of children. By that time, however, he had become so unhappy at school, his attitude and poor self concept made it almost impossible for him to reach anywhere near his potential. He had reached a point where he needed serious counselling and medication. The

opportunity to work by distance education offered a solution to some of the problems being faced by Troy, and with time he and his mother appeared to have worked out how to manage his studies.

Like Troy Proctor, James Camisa (Case Study 5) was involved in distance education because he was geographically isolated, but his mother thought that distance education was more suitable for him than regular schools. "The best decision the family ever made," Mrs Camisa said, "was to put James on distance education and go prospecting." At James' last school he had been "a failing student". The teachers told her he was the "class clown" and that he had learning disabilities. She suspected they needed an extra student to get a special class at the school, and James was targeted as "that student." She felt that the distance education teachers viewed the students as individuals and interacted more positively with them. James was a more confident person since he had been working with this type of education, she said: "The one-to-one is good for him and he is getting quality time".

In addition to these two geographically isolated students who preferred the relationships with schools provided by distance education, there were three referral students who preferred the relationships in distance education. These student were Owen Abrahams (Case Study 1), David Cooke (Case Study 6) and Daphne Jekich (Case Study 12).

Owen Abrahams (Case Study 1) had spent much of his previous few years truanting from the high school in a nearby town. As an outcome of his lack of success and poor attendance at school, he had been involved in a number of minor criminal offences. His guardians were delighted with the progress Owen made through distance education, crediting it with keeping him out the juvenile justice system. Without distance education, Mrs Riley though that Owen would have been "one of those casualties" in juvenile detention. She explained why she thought it was better for Owen to study by distance education at the local primary school:

> I really like how this school is set up because, you know, this is a thing we never had in [the high school] I mean, see, the big schools, teachers don't know you as much as, here they know you on one to-one, and you're one big family. I'm all in agreeance with that because everybody is very good friends with everybody else and you don't get this little nastiness.

Mrs Riley thought that distance education was "the best thing that could ever happen to really any kid" because they were "not like locked up in classroom" and they did not have to go "from one room to do [one thing] and then to another room to do something else, and another room to do something else".

David Cooke (Case Study 6) was referred to distance education for medical reasons but his family had a history of concern about mainstream schooling. Mr and Mrs Cooke had not been happy with the school performance of any of the younger children. Mr Cook's view, bolstered by his own dissatisfaction as a teacher in regular schools, was that schools do not cater very well for

sensitive children like David and his brother. As Mr Cooke explained, "we have a very sensitive group of children which don't mix well with the rough and tumble of the normal school life." David began to fail at school in Year 5. Because his illness was difficult to diagnose, it took Mr Cooke a long time to accept that David's health was a major cause of his difficulties at school. According to his parents he was a very timid child without very much self confidence, who became quite mischievous when failure set in due to his ill-health. In Year 7 he was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome. He struggled on with school for the next two years but was unable to cope with the physical and mental demands of high school. His poor organisational skills, lack of self-discipline, ill-health and difficult behaviour led to serious depression. Mr Cooke eventually persuaded the Education Department to allow David to study through distance education. The family was delighted with the progress he had since made:

> David's not subject to all those variables of distraction at school, teacher moods, peer pressure, just all the wasted time and disorganisation in the blackboard jungle ... You know, he just absolutely gave the whole system up, socially, academically, just chucked it all in. And so now with the one-to-one and the motivation that we've been giving him, he's come out with mostly A's and B's.

David expressed the opinion that distance education was a lot easier than regular schools because "you don't have the pressure from the teacher breathing down your neck and yelling at you and putting you in detention." In his previous school, David thought that he had a bad reputation:

> They didn't give me a chance ... they just didn't want to listen because, don't know where they got it from, but the teachers think I have a bad reputation as being annoying. And I'm not, I'm really a nice person.

Daphne Jekich (Case Study 12) left her local high school in the middle of Year 10 as she felt the standard of education was poor. She travelled to the eastern states, for a time, after leaving school and then returned to live in a Perth suburb with friends. Daphne's relationship with her mother had deteriorated and that was one of the reasons she did not return home. During this period Daphne received the homeless youth allowance and spent most of her time reading, watching television and "getting bored". It was during this period Daphne heard about distance education from one of her parents' neighbours. A strongly independent young woman, Daphne saw distance education as an alternative to the lives being led by her old school friends. "Everyone over 14 in Mangrove is pushing a pram," she said. Daphne's closest confidante was her co-ordinator at the Distance Education Centre. Daphne and the co-ordinator developed a very close working relationship, which played an important role in Daphne's success in distance education. She enjoyed visiting the Distance Education Centre. She said that the teachers were encouraging and positive towards the students. Her previous experience with teachers had given her a negative view of the profession:

> I was at Mangrove High School, that's the worst place, the teachers, no matter how good you're doing or anything they're, oh they're always down your throat trying to give you a kick up the back, like 'do better, do better' sort of thing. But distance ed. is totally different, like, they set you straight on how you're going and all that. When you listen to them it makes you feel better and you do better and that. Like at school it's just 'Oh well, they think I'm stupid, I'll be stupid'.

Despite this evidence of five cases where distance education had improved the educational relationships in which students worked, distance education was not without its costs in relationship terms. Whereas school of the air students had air lessons to keep them in touch with other students, students working mainly with printed materials were more isolated from their peers. David Cooke (Case Study 6), for example, was happy working on distance education but said that her missed contact with his school friends and was "getting bored" with distance education. Mrs Cooke also expressed some concerns about the social isolation of studying by distance education. Mrs Beard (Case Study 3), too, was concerned that Justin's isolation made him lonely. "There's something missing if you haven't got friends to talk to," she said. William Douglas's (Case Study 9) response to isolation from his peers was to inhabit a rich imaginary world. Case Study 9 contains several examples of the narrative monologues William improvised, in a feigned Mexican accent, while also talking aloud to himself about his school work.

Family Relationships

Students' participation in distance education often has significant consequences for the whole family. These consequences varied across the case studies and included negative affects on other siblings of the huge work-load often required to support a student in distance education, and positive affects on parents' relationships with children. In the case of David Cooke (Case Study 6), for example, there were both positive and negative affects on relationships. David's distance education had involved the complete rescheduling of family life, which had caused some resentment among the other children. On the other hand, Mr Cooke felt that by teaching David he had established a much closer relationship with him. He appreciated his son more than he had previously. "This has developed just since distance education," he said. "I never had this relationship with my older son. ... [David is] more forthright and straightforward now since we've been working closely together." Similarly, Mrs Daniels (Case Study 7) enjoyed the time she spent Christopher while he worked on distance education, and had chosen the life of a caravan traveller in order to spend more time with him.

Whether or not distance education improved relationships in the families, in most cases it required a huge commitment from parents or others involved in supporting the distance learner. Mr Jacobs (Case Studies 10 and 11) indicated that the family commitment to educating students by distance education could be very demanding, and that it could put extra pressure on family life. Mr

Jacobs had employed a governess, but still found that it was hard to find the balance between parenting, supervising and his work on the station. "Time and relationships can be difficult," he said. Mrs Jacobs confirmed that the additional workload of distance education was a problem, as well as the impact it could have on relationships within the family. Mrs Cameron (Case Study 4) confirmed that it was important for parents to be involved with their children's distance education work, even if they employed a governess:

> The thing is, if your governess goes tomorrow you have to step straight in and if you're not up there keeping up with all the records and everything of what's going on, what they want from you, you can't step in and take over. It's a major operation to read through all the materials.

Many of the parents who filled the home tutor role themselves regarded this work as very important. Mrs Kelly (Case Study 13) felt that she had developed a great deal of knowledge about educating children in isolated areas through her earlier role as a governess, and was pleased that she now had the opportunity to pass this knowledge on by teaching her own children. Mrs Kelly found teaching "very satisfying" and preferred to employ someone to help with the housework than to employ a governess. Mrs Dansie (Case Study 8), had a similar view of her role as a home tutor. She described teaching the children as her "main purpose of being here". Since the first of her four children had started school eleven years ago, she and Mr Dansie had given school their top priority. "We both made the decision from the start that school came first," she said. "I think you have to do that. You want your child ... to have had the best you can give them." For this reason, decisions about work on the station always took account of the children's school work. The recent "stragglers" shearing, for example, had been organised around the school holidays so that the children—whose labour is an essential part of this task—could help without missing any school time. Mrs Dansie appreciated her husband's support when there was a potential conflict between school and work. If necessary, she said, she could say to Mr Dansie, "Sorry, we can't do that. School comes first".

Not all parents were as positive as Mrs Dansie and Mrs Kelly about the home tutor role. Finding time to ensure adequate supervision had been a problem for Mrs Rourke (Case Study 15). There were many other demands on her time, especially during shearing and mustering. This year, for the first time, Mr and Mrs Rourke had hired a governess during the peak workload periods. Instead of paying someone else to help during mustering, they had paid someone to teach the girls while Mrs Rourke helped with the mustering. This had been much better, she thought:

> [The governess] was great. She just spent all morning in there without moving, you know. She'd just spend the whole time in the school room and the kids just did so much more work. I mean, I get the work done, the maths and language done, but I don't get the pictures and presentation stuff done because [I] just haven't got time.

The pressure of time led her to concentrate on the subjects she regarded as most important. Last year, for example, she had not done any art. Having a governess for some of the year had allowed the children to do more art, which they had "really enjoyed." Another bonus from having the governess, Mrs Rourke said, was that the girls had someone who had "a bit more patience". While she had a governess, Mrs Rourke felt more like "a normal mum, sending the kids off to school":

> [W]hen I had the governesses I enjoyed that time because I knew the girls were in there having someone in there teaching them. I knew I could just do whatever I felt like and it was relaxing time because they'd come out to me with a problem that maybe [the governess] said, "go and see Mum about this". And it would be easier, I'd fix it, they'd go back and it was all very relaxing. It was fun.

Despite the thousands of hours she had spent teaching the girls, Mrs Rourke sometimes found her work in the school room stressful. It was hard, she said, knowing that "you have to go in there and spend four hours every morning", especially if there was other work to be done. Some days, she said, "I come out of there with this huge headache and I think 'What am I doing in there?'" According to Mrs Rourke, being a teacher was "hard" and she did not think she was "very good at it":

> It's really hard. Because you are not taught to teach, it's hard, you know. I hope the girls have done alright. That's all you can do.

Home Tutor Roles

For many years, research on distance education for children has drawn attention to the importance of the role of the 'home tutor' or 'home supervisor'. In 1975, *The Education of Isolated Children in Western Australia* (Education Department of Western Australia, 1975) concluded that "Just as the quality of the education of a child in a conventional school depends to a large extent on the teacher, so the education of an isolated child depends on the quality of the supervisor". These sentiments were echoed in later research reports by the Queensland Education Department (1979, p. 35) and in studies by Taylor and Tomlinson (1984, p. 25) and Tomlinson, Coulter and Peacock (1985, p. 77).

Home tutors play a variety of roles, not all of which are characteristic of the formal student-teacher roles that characterise regular schooling. Five overlapping roles may be distinguished from the case study data: home tutors as supervisor, teacher, mentor, co-learner, and parent. Home tutors working in the *supervisor* role focus on completion of the task. Home tutors in the *teacher* role confidently assume that they know what the student ought to learn from the text. In the *mentor* role, home tutors focus on keeping the learning relationship between themselves and the student alive. Home tutors in *the co-learner* role, in contrast, immerse themselves in the learning problems faced by

the student. In the *parent* role, home tutors seamlessly combine their existing role as a member of the family with their distance education role as a home tutor. In some case studies, many of these roles seem to be available to the home tutor; in other cases, just one or two of the home tutor roles seem to be well developed. In the account of the roles of the home tutor which follows, for example, Mrs Dansie (Case Study 8) acts in four of the five roles.

Supervisor

When home tutors act in the supervisor role they focus their attention on making sure that the work gets done. This role is very well developed among distance education home tutors. Mrs Kelly (Case Study 13), for example, often worked in the supervisor role, especially with her older children. "I just explain what has to be done and they go ahead and do it," she said. "They just get in and do it." Similarly, Mr Cooke explained that with David "you've got to motivate him and keep him to the task and have a very strict schedule." During Sophie Dansie's language lesson (Case Study 8), Mrs Dansie sometimes acted in the supervisor role. She told the children when to start activities ("I want you to start your language now"); checked that understood the instructions ("Do you know what to do?"); monitored whether they were making sufficient progress to justify the time being spent ("Come on, hurry up"; "find it, come on"; "don't spend all of your time fiddling with that."); and she told them when it was acceptable to proceed without completing a task that had been set ("Just leave it").

Teacher

The role of the teacher requires more active involvement than supervision, and is characterised by the assumption of the home tutor's greater knowledge of the content than the student. There were many examples of home tutors acting in the teacher role. For example, Mrs Dansie's behaviour (Case Study 8) moved beyond the supervisor's role in merely checking that work had been started and finished adequately when she said looked over Sophie's shoulder while she was completing an exercise on "Words, phrases and clauses" and said, "I'd have put something like ...", just as a class teacher might if she were walking past a student who looked confused. Another example of a home tutor acting in this teacher role was the work of Helga (the governess in Case Study 4) with the two junior primary-aged siblings of the Cameron family.

One extended example of a home tutor acting in the teacher role occurred in Case Study 2 where the governess' Tracey was asked to help Emily with a mathematics lesson. Emily began by asking Tracey what the text meant by "median". Tracey explained that median was "the middle spot" but, having looked at the task in the text, also gave Emily the additional hint, "remember you have to put them into order". Tracey guessed that Emily would not understand the concept, so instead of returning to the younger children as soon as she had answered the question, she hovered in the background until Emily found that she needed more assistance. Emily soon had another question:

EMILY:	It says, what is the median?
TRACEY:	Yes, you want to find out the median mass.
EMILY:	Of what?
TRACEY:	So you have to put them into order first. The smallest, so you've got two of 26, and so, which one's next?
EMILY:	Mmm, and then, that one...
TRACEY:	28...
EMILY:	...then that one...
TRACEY:	...30...
SARAH:	I've done that Tracey.
TRACEY:	So if we write...no, no hang on
EMILY:	...then 36.
TRACEY:	Okay, so which one came in the middle?
EMILY:	Um, thir.., oh, um 28.
TRACEY:	(inaudible) What is the mode? Which mass appears more than once?
EMILY:	Oh, 26.
TRACEY:	What is Damien's mass?
EMILY:	30
TRACEY:	30 what?
EMILY:	30 Kgs
TRACEY:	Mm, which stands for what?
EMILY:	Kilograms

During this section of the lesson, Tracey gave clear, direct and personal assistance to Emily. She knew the student and the content well enough to guess where Emily would have problems ("The middle spot ... you have to put them in order"). She patiently repeated the instruction when, as she expected, Emily was not able to complete the work unaided ("you have to put them in order") and she worked through the exercise asking leading questions ("you've got two of 26 ... which one's next?"). Then, having completed the exercise to find the median, she moved Emily on to the next activity, to find the mode ("Which mass appears more than once?") while incidentally revising an unrelated skill ("30 Kgs" ... "Mm, which stands for what?" ... "Kilograms"). Without a clear understanding of the mathematical concepts of different measures of central tendency ("median ... the middle spot"; "mode ... "Which mass appears more than once?"), Tracey would not have been able to work with Emily in this conventional teacher role. Her assured and confident assistance may be contrasted with the difficulty with language and concepts mentioned by some parents who were home tutors.

Mentor

In some of the case studies the student was supported by another person whose most important role seemed to be as a mentor. Unlike the formal subordinate and superior relationships between teachers and their students, there was a sense of camaraderie between students and their mentors. The mentor relationship between Daphne Jekich (Case Study 12) and her distance education co-ordinator was an essential part of Daphne's capacity to persist and succeed in distance education when she had not done so in a regular school.

The mentor relationship between Des, the police officer, and Owen Abrahams was also one of the key characteristics of Owen's success (Case Study 1). Des had established a very strong personal relationship with Owen. This was evident in the playful and very masculine social interactions which took place when they were not doing school work, and especially through the body language and physical skylarking engaged in by Des and Owen in between the more serious attention given to school activities. At the same time, Des was quite authoritarian and persistent about ensuring that Owen completed his work. Des developed a practice of determined coaxing which appeared to keep Owen motivated and on task. In his role of mentor, Des moved from light-heartedly keeping Owen on task to making it clear that some issues were not negotiable. Case Study 1 provided the following example of the way in which their relationship was played out:

OWEN:	Who's that? Hey, why do I have to do English...
DES:	Now.
OWEN:	...twice and maths once.
DES:	Because maths (inaudible) time.
OWEN:	What?
DES:	Eight fifty to nine forty, that's maths for an hour and half, and English you only do thirty minutes.
OWEN:	Hey, sissy, I don't start at eight fifty, I start at nine o'clock.
DES:	Should've been here at eight fifty then shouldn't you? Alright, get your, you'll need two sheets.
OWEN:	Will I?

Notice the familiarity when Owen addressed Des—an adult and a police officer—as "sissy" and the way he questioned "why" he must do things. The tone and language used in this exchange was quite different from the dialogue usually found in classrooms. Des ignored all of the evasive moves and demands made by Owen and quietly persisted by showing him where to begin his sentence. When the conversation continued after an interruption, Des went on to help Owen:

DES:	You remember, start there, "Mr Fuller" ... Yes, because, remember you're doing dialogue.

OWEN: Why?

DES: Because how are they going to know who's talking?

OWEN: Yeah but how am I going to write their name in there's, that's too small.

DES: No, not in there. You just write it here. On the other side of the line. I'd already wrote this so you'd know what to put there.

OWEN: Number one.

DES: No don't write one. That's what your sentence is. (*pause 10 secs*). So you write "Mrs Grace", alright, no, no, just put dot dot, dot dot there you go and inverted commas, remember, because it's talking. And off you go. Capital letters and all that.

Des disregarded Owen's attempts to avoid the task by quietly insisting that the writing be completed while ignoring the protests made by him. In a normal school setting many of Owen's comments could easily have been interpreted as rude or a display of disobedience, however Des disregarded these comments and continued to encourage him to finish his work. Maintaining a balance between being a friend and coaxing Owen to finish his work appeared to be an important part of the work done by Des.

Co-learner

In several of the case studies, the home tutor seemed to work alongside the students as a co-learner, enjoying the mutual search for understanding, drawing students on to further knowledge without overtly organising their work. The role of home tutor as co-learner was characteristic of Mrs Daniel's work with Chris in Case Study 7.

Mrs Daniels developed a non-threatening, conversational and equitable dialogue style to scaffold Chris's learning. The following example of Mrs Daniels helping Chris with a problem in science was typical of the way learning was constructed for him. Notice the way she showed him where to look in the text for the correct information, refocussed him on the question, clarified the question and then clarified the answer:

MRS DANIELS: If you look along the name of whales, sea lions, and orcas that might help you. A group of animals, mammals is it? Have a look at your scale to (inaudible).

CHRIS: It wasn't in the scale, think it wasn't. Just look. (*pause 25 secs*)

MRS DANIELS: (inaudible) Where did it talk about mammals?

CHRIS: Didn't talk about mammals much.

MRS DANIELS: It must of or it wouldn't ask the question. (*reading*) Started off talking about fossils, and then

(inaudible) then the rock that they were found in. (*pause 10 secs*)

CHRIS: See this, there's mammals.

MRS DANIELS: It just says 'earliest reptiles.' What's the question? From which group of animals did mammals develop? This is your note that the animal group, see.

CHRIS: Yeah, I know.

MRS DANIELS: See here. Branches of the tree register different groups (*pause 10 secs*). Well, if you follow that graph, okay, from the earliest reptiles...

CHRIS: Just put the earliest reptiles.

Part of the role of co-learner involves helping the student interpret their distance education texts. In Case Study 8, for example, Mrs Dansie became involved in trying to figure out what might have been in the minds of the teachers who designed the activities the children were trying to complete. This was particularly evident in the struggle she and Sophie had trying to understand what was involved in an exercise on adjectival clauses and adverbial phrases:

SOPHIE: You're supposed to add words to the sentence.

MRS DANSIE: Right, so, mmm. (*Reading*) Well, what would he be doing?

SOPHIE: Ploughing.

MRS DANSIE: Ploughing the paddock or something. You might even be able to sort of say what the man was like.

Mrs Dansie's first strategy was to read the instruction aloud. Next, she asked a question which took them both back through the material they already knew and which may been relevant ("What is an adjective?" "A describing word."). When this strategy left them without understanding the relationship between the known (adjective) and the unknown (adjectival clause) she went back to the lesson guidelines provided by the school:

> (*Reading aloud*) 'Quickly begins with the word quick', 'other words which begin with adjectival clause are to, too, that and who.' Lay on the floor of the shed. Why would he be laying on the floor?

This strategy seemed about to be successful ("Why would he be laying on the floor?"), when the arrival of the principal enabled her to find out more directly what might have been in the minds of the teachers who set the work. Mrs Dansie had applied a range of co-learning strategies as she tried to make the distance education texts come to life and yield a meaning that would allow Sophie to complete the activity. Her strategies were quite different from those adopted by the principal, who gave a response more characteristic of some one working in the teacher role:

PRINCIPAL: You know when I was at primary school Sophie, one of the many things that I failed and I hated, was adjectival clauses and phrases and adverbial phrases. It had no meaning for me at all. (*Reading*) 'It lit up the darkened sky from horizon to horizon.' ... So you've done all those ones and you're up to 2B. (inaudible) shearer, and you know the difference between adjectives. You know what adjectives are? What do they do?

SOPHIE: Ah they, they describe things.

PRINCIPAL: Describe the word. It's going to tell how he lay on the floor of the shanty. And adverbial is going to add meaning to the verb, that's going to tell how he did something. So this one's going to describe how he lay, I mean it could be an adverbial one too but he might have, the shearer might have collapsed exhausted after work and lay on the shanty floor.

His first reaction to Sophie's confusion was to say that when he was at school such activities had "no meaning" for him. This statement was encoded as a personal anecdote about himself as a child, but presumably also meant that as a teacher he did not regard adjectival and adverbial clauses as useful knowledge. He went on to provide an elaborated and amusing explanation without having to search for meaning in the lifeless text. As a teacher, he seemed empowered to act as a critic of the text and the activity. Confronted by problems in the distance education texts, Mrs Dansie was less likely to ascribe the problem to the construction of the text or the task and more likely to place herself in the position of a co-learner, trying to solve the problem set by the text.

Parent

For many students, one of the important differences between regular classrooms and distance education is that there was an overlap between family and school relationships. For example, in Case Study 8, Mrs Dansie moved easily from the role of the co-learner to the role of the supervisor, and then to the role of the parent. This movement between roles took place, for example, while Sophie was working on a book review of Tim Winton's novel *Lockie Leonard*. Sophie also had a copy of the text *Language Checkpoints 4* open in front of her. Responding to one of the instructions in the text book, Sophie tried to work out where the novel was set. Unable to work it out, she turned to Mrs Dansie and asked for help:

MRS DANSIE: Where do you think it's set?

SOPHIE: I'm not sure. It's somewhere outside Perth. They've said that.

Mrs Dansie picked up the book and, in the role of the co-learner, attempted to solve the problem by identifying the setting. The text book's instructions, of course, were generic instructions about writing a book review and there was no particular reason to believe that the town in which *Lockie Leonard* was set would be named. While Sophie waited, Mrs Dansie spent about a minute looking for the name of the country town. Unable to find the location, Mrs Dansie switched to the role of the supervisor, monitoring the student's effective use of time, and told Sophie to "leave it" and go on with the rest of the exercise. While Sophie continued writing, Mrs Dansie looked for the name of the town in the book. Ten minutes later, she handed the book back to Sophie. She had not found out the name of the place it was set, but her quick scan of the book had reminded her of her son Tom, away at boarding school. Putting aside the roles of the supervisor and the co-learner, she spoke to Sophie as a parent and Sophie responded as a daughter and sister:

MRS DANSIE:	Actually Tom probably would have enjoyed [*Lockie Leonard*].
SOPHIE.	Yes and Katie wanted to read it.
MRS DANSIE.	Oh, she can get it from the school library.
SOPHIE.	Yes.

Older and Younger Students

It is a common-place of distance education that the older the students the less time and support is required from the home tutor. Mrs Rourke (Case Study 15), for example, explained that when the children are younger, "You can't just sneak out for five minutes to put the washing on." Now that her girls are in Years 6 and 7, she has more freedom to organise her time around their needs. Because she no longer has to read all of the instructions to the girls, she can say, "I'm off for five minutes, you'll be alright?" There are some disadvantages in supervising older children, however. As Mrs Rourke put it, "the questions are a lot trickier."

In six of the fourteen case study families, there were two or more siblings studying together. Many of the home tutors indicated that this caused difficulties. Dr Douglas (Case Study 9) rushed to fit in the demands of helping Mia (Year 1) and William (Year 7) and her farm and household duties. Mrs Jacobs (Case Studies 10 and 11) said that it was difficult to give each child the same amount of attention with their lessons. She thought that the youngest child tended to get the most attention in the classroom. This was echoed by Tracey, the governess in Case Study 2.

Whether they worked alone or with siblings, older students such as Daphne (Case Study 12) , David (Case Study 6) and Justin (Case Study 3) were among the most independent learners. Students who had spent many years working on distance education with their siblings, such as Emily (Case Study 2) and Sophie (Case Study 8), had learned to take for granted that they would be need to be more independent. Sophie, for example, explained that she had been

"working on [her] own since I was Year 3 because Roberta has to have Mum with her."

Mrs Kelly (Case Study 13) found that the two older children, Stephanie and Linda, demanded much less assistance than the two younger children, Vicki and Will. As Mrs Kelly explained:

> Stephanie and Linda don't need much supervision for their language exercises. I just explain what has to be done and they go ahead and do it. Stephanie and Linda have got very good attitudes towards school. They just get in and do it. The sooner they get it done the sooner its finished. Vicki hasn't twigged to that yet. Vicki needs a lot of supervision and so does Will, but because he's only in Grade 2.

Mrs Kelly's explanation supports several possible explanations for the tendency of the younger children to get the most attention. In part, it may be due to age ("he's only in Grade 2"). Alternatively, it may be something to do with the older children having learned a particular attitude towards their distance education work. Perhaps Stephanie and Linda "just get in and do it" because they have learned that the most important thing about their school work is that "the sooner they get it done, the sooner they get it finished." This instrumental view of distance learning was certainly expressed by many of the case study students.

A third possible explanation has to do with the curriculum characteristics. In the case of primary language, in particular, the junior primary materials seemed designed with one-to-one teaching in mind, whereas the senior primary materials required much less home tutor involvement. Tracey (the governess in Case Study 2), for example, found the junior primary language materials used by Sarah (Year 2) very demanding.

The relatively high demands on home tutors made by these whole language-based junior primary materials has been noted by the project leader responsible for the development of the materials. As she said in her evaluation of a trial of the materials:

> The approach required home tutors to be involved in oral language activities with their students. Discussion, brainstorming, questioning and 'thinking aloud' required more time than the processing done previously during tutoring with traditional materials. Home tutors with one child did not find these new activities burdensome. However, home tutors with responsibilities for more than one child found it difficult to successfully divide their time. (Gilmour, 1991, p. 64)

Increased student literacy, more instrumental learning patterns or less interactive curriculum design may all contribute to the general decline in older students' demands on their home tutors. Against this general trend for the older children to demand less time, there were also examples of individual

children who did not fit the rule. Peta, the Year 6 student in Case Study 4, was not able to work independent of her governess and competed with the younger children for Helga's attention. The younger children demanded a great deal of attention. Dwyer was very dependent on Helga whereas Michelle was more focussed on her work although she still needed a lot of assistance because she was in Year 2 and is not yet a fluent reader. Peta was expected to work more independently but was not yet able to do this. She was still quite dependent on Helga and made few attempts to resolve her own problems. She repeatedly requested attention in a polite yet demanding manner, "Helga can you help me please?" On other occasions she uses diversionary tactics such as "Helga my pencil's not working right" or "Helga, I can't do it with my ruler because it's too hard to get my ruler in there". This dependent behaviour may be contrasted with her fiercely independent behaviour outside the classroom. During smoko she noticed that Dwyer's bike wheels were not working properly so she ordered him to take the bike to the blacksmith shop where she proceeded to repair the bike with enormous confidence.

Feedback and Assessment

One of the enduring structural inflexibilities of distance learning has been the delay between students' completion of their set work and the availability of feedback from their teachers. Despite the best endeavours of teachers, it is difficult to reduce the turn-around time to two or three weeks. Even then, the earlier work completed in a set is two weeks older than the last work completed in a set. One of the consequences of this inevitable delay is that many students pay more attention to the reward stickers they receive than to their teachers' careful written responses. Tracey, the governess in Case Study 2 explained her students' reaction to feedback:

> It takes a couple of weeks before they get it back from their teachers. I read through it when it comes back, but most of the time they're not interested. They're in the middle of something completely different and [they say] 'What's come back? Oh, we'll see how many stickers we got'.

Emily confirmed that her first reaction to receiving marked work back from her teacher was to "look for the stickers". Also, she would "look for good comments" and Tracey would usually "read us out the little sheet of paper that they write about how we're going." From Emily's point of view, the feedback she received from Tracey was more valuable than the feedback she gets received through the mail:

> I feel pretty good when I get my work back from [my teacher] but I think I take more notice of Tracey's feedback because she is actually there when I do it and by the time I get my set back I am usually interested in something else and I've forgotten what the set was really about.

In some cases, the speed of feedback had been increased by the use of modem links to schools. Mrs Rourke (Case Study 15) noted that when language work was sent in by modem, feedback delay was much reduced and the feedback "seems to mean a lot more":

> I can send that in by the end of the week, Friday, and have it back the next week, Wednesday, or something like that. It's good, because usually by the time you send the set away [some written work] can be a week old, and then they mark it and send it back. It can be three week's old before the kids see it, and by then the kids have lost all interest in it, they don't really want to know about it. 'That was three weeks ago, what do we want to know that for?'

Marks are more commonplace than stickers in the secondary years, and where marks are given they also seems more important to students than teachers' written comments. Owen Abrahams (Case Study 1), for example, explained that his reaction to receiving work back from his teachers was to "look at the mark":

OWEN:	Look at the mark.
INT:	And do you read what they say as well or do you..?
OWEN:	Sometimes.
INT:	So the mark's the most important thing to you, but do you also like to read what their comments are?
OWEN:	Not most of the time.
INT:	And when they tell you to do things that you haven't completed, do you do them? Like if they say to you...
OWEN:	Yeah, I get made to do them.
INT:	Who makes you?
OWEN:	Des.

Similar comments about the relative importance of stickers, marks and comments were made by several students. David Cooke (Case Study 6) said "I read the comments but it's the marks", and acknowledged that he would rarely review his work unless his father made him do so.

A few students combined their peers' interest in stickers and marks with a more self-monitoring attention to the content of teachers' feedback. William Douglas (Case Study 9), for example, said "I get the stickers, then I read the teacher's letter and then I look at all my work that he sent back". When her work was returned, Sophie Dansie (Case Study 8) said she would carefully consider the written feedback she received from her teachers. She would look for mistakes and then go back to the beginning of the activity to check what she did not understand. Sometimes her teacher would write her a letter "saying I've done well or something like that", she said. Awards and stickers

sent to her by the school are another important part of the way she found out how well she is going at school. "I've, all my awards that I've gotten during my schooling years," she said. "Later I'm going to put them in a special file."

Assessment

The case study research highlighted two assessment issues which are particularly problematic in distance education. The first of these is that it is unusually difficult for teachers to make normative judgements from students' set work. How much of the work was completed by the student and how much by the home tutor? Mrs Rourke (Case Study 15) explained that it was hard for the teachers to get a true measure of the children's performance, because it is "only when they come out to visit that they actually get to work with the child." In contrast, the regular work which they send in to be marked is not a true indication because "when you send in work, you've already looked at it":

> With the work sent in they're not getting their true reading of how the kid's going because you've already been through it with [the children]. Sometimes it's been changed and all they're getting is an end result, and not actually seeing the kids working.

As Figure 6 indicates, the survey data supported the impression from the cases studies that most of the respondents in the child categories usually had an adult check their work before sending it to the distance education teachers.

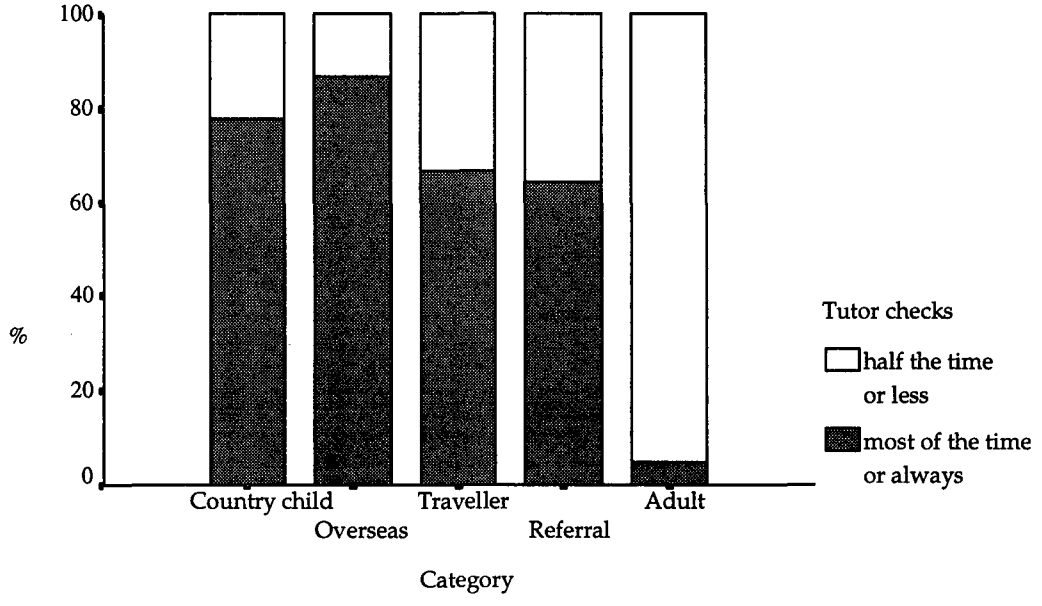

Figure 6. **Percentages of respondents in each category who had their work checked before sending it off**

Mrs Kelly (Case Study 13) also suggested that some of the work the children send in did not really indicate whether they are having problems or not:

> See that's another thing with kids in isolation—you really don't know sort of ... Like take Vicki, and she really does have problems, but all the work that she sends in with her set work just comes out fine, you know, sort of as though she's got no problems at all.

Justin Beard (Case Study 3) was one of the few students who had taken action to overcome the problem of not knowing from sets how well he was performing in comparison with other students. He completed all of his test under supervision, even though he knew that some other students did not. This was important, he said, because it allowed him to monitor his own progress accurately:

> I mean [tests] are really important because they're your end of unit assessment things so I mean if you're not so good a student and you go brilliantly in your tests it's not really a true picture of what you are.

The second assessment issue revealed was that the isolation of students and home tutors discourages teachers (especially primary teachers) from making normative judgements about performance. Several home tutors of primary school-aged students said that when they have sought direct assessments of students' performance from teachers, it has was not readily given. Emily Baker's governess (Case Study 2), for example, said that when she asked direct questions about performance she received an "airy fairy sort of answer" such as "Oh well she's doing quite well". Mrs Baker had the same kind of experience when Sarah was in Year 1 and did not quickly learn to read. When she expressed her concerns to teachers making a home visit she was told, "I wouldn't worry about it, some kids are slower on the uptake than others, I wouldn't worry about it at all. All of a sudden it'll just click." William Douglas's mother (Case Study 9) expressed concerns about the absence of normative feedback:

> DR DOUGLAS: Well I think they deliberately don't rate them compared to other students.
>
> INT: Right.
>
> DR DOUGLAS: And I so I wouldn't know whether they were praising all the students as much as they were praising Will or whether he is better.
>
> INT: Right.
>
> DR DOUGLAS: Or just the same or what, you know.

One response to the lack of normative assessment was for parents to make their own comparative judgements. Mrs Cameron (Case Study 4), for example, kept in touch with other families whose children were studying by distance education in an effort to make comparisons between their children and her own. One of the schools of the air had made the comparisons more formal by participating in the state-wide Monitoring Standards in Education assessments. Quite a few of the mothers were concerned about standardised testing, according to Stephanie Kelly's mother (Case Study 13). At first, she

was "pretty anti the standardised testing" but as a result of participating in the testing program she had changed her mind. It is "important to know where you are at," she said:

> Last year she did one of these standardised tests and she reads a lot and I was quite shocked with her comprehension. She had a comprehension thing and I was quite shocked. She really didn't understand the passage at all. She did, but she couldn't answer the questions and in the set work they do a lot of oral comprehension where they ask questions and she could answer that quite well and I sort of know when you answer you go 'oh', 'ah', 'um' and I could understand her but actually putting it down on paper she really struggled.

Teachers working in distance education are in a double bind when it comes to normative assessment. Providing feedback about performance is an essential part of the teaching process, but (especially in the primary years) the teachers can't afford to give too much feedback that will be perceived by home tutors as negative. Home tutors are isolated, often inexperienced, and regard their children's performance as a direct reflection of their own success as parents. As Mrs Rourke (Case Study 15) explained, she was most appreciative of the encouragement her daughters' teachers provided:

> With the teachers that I've got [it's] encouragement all the time. Every now and again it'll be just sort of like, 'Oh this is great but you know maybe next time you could do this', which is terrific. I've had teachers that haven't been and it's just been real negative and the kids just don't want to look at it and think, 'Yuck, you know, I thought it was good'. I think this year it's been good.

Conclusions

Many students worked unsupervised for much of their time. Estimates from the survey data varied between the adult and child from of the survey, but the children's survey indicated that about half of the students were unsupervised "most of the time or always." Students in the country and overseas categories said that they spent more time on school work each day than students in the traveller and referral categories. In the case studies, secondary students tended to start later and work longer than primary students. Most of the primary students were located on pastoral stations, and tended to start work early and finish by lunch-time. Primary students received much closer supervision than secondary students. Some Year 6 and 7 students worked independently and set their own daily time-tables, as did some Year 8, 9 and 10 students. Among both primary and secondary students, there was a complete range from working under close home tutor supervision to working almost entirely without home tutor involvement. Secondary aged students, almost all of whom had completed primary education in a regular school, found learning to organise their work one of the most difficult aspects of transition from regular

schooling to distance education. The most successful secondary students had developed very strong self-monitoring learning strategies.

Five of the eight secondary students, including two who were in the "referral" category and three who were in the "country" category had a history of conflict with regular schools and teachers. For these five students, distance education offered opportunities to develop more personal learning relationships with their home tutors and teachers than they had been able to develop in the context of regular schooling. For several of these students, distance education had very positive outcomes for their learning. In addition, distance education played essential social roles, preventing children from becoming "casualties" in juvenile justice system or "pushing a pram" at 14, in the words of case study participants. In addition, several home tutors argued that distance education had allowed them to improve their relationships with their children.

Whether or not parents regarded distance education as improving their relationships with their children, distance education required a huge commitment from parents and others involved in supporting the student. In all but one case, family members or a governess living with the family provided support in the home tutor role. The one student who did not have family support, a student in the referral category, found the support she needed from her co-ordinator at the Distance Education Centre. Although some home tutors enjoyed the role and regarded it as a very satisfying experience, some found it difficult to ration their time between the school room and their other duties. As one home tutor said, she would prefer to be "a normal mum, sending the kids off to school."

The role of the home tutor has long been regarded as essential to the success of distance education. Home tutors visited in the case studies played a variety of roles. Five overlapping roles were identified from the case study data: home tutors as *supervisor, teacher, mentor, co-learner,* and *parent.* Home tutors working in the supervisor role focus on completion of the task. Home tutors in the teacher role confidently assume that they know what the student ought to learn from the text. In the mentor role, home tutors focus on keeping the learning relationship between themselves and the student alive. Home tutors in the co-learner role, in contrast, immerse themselves in the learning problems faced by the student. In the parent role, home tutors combine their existing role as a member of the family with their distance education role as a home tutor. In some case studies, many of these roles seemed to be available to the home tutor; in other cases, just one or two of the home tutor roles seemed to be well developed.

The relatively limited availability of feedback from teachers was identified by many of the home tutors and students as a problem they faced in supervision. The long delay between students' completion of a set and the arrival back of marked work meant that many students paid little attention to the teachers' comments when they arrived. More often, students were interested in the stickers and awards that accompanied returned work. Some of the older and

more committed students carefully considered teachers' feedback, but this was relatively rare.

Two assessment issues were also highlighted by the research. One issue was the difficulty for teachers of making normative judgements based on the set work submitted by students. Approximately 80% of the students in the survey reported that they had an adult check their work before it was submitted. One home tutor noted that a child's "set work comes out fine" even though she knew the child "really [did] have problems". This difficulty in establishing normative standards was aggravated by teachers' limited use of marks, grades and standards, especially with primary students. Several home tutors noted that teachers gave indirect answers to hard questions about comparative standards. The one school of the air parent who had experience of feedback based on state-wide testing had at first been reluctant, but was now in favour of standardised testing. Teachers dealing with isolated students are in a double bind, of course, especially with students whose performance is relatively poor or whose home tutors are inexperienced. Providing feedback about standards is an essential part of teaching, but isolated and inexperienced home tutors prefer to receive encouragement and are likely to regard students' poor performance as a direct reflection on their teaching.

PART 2

CHAPTER 6
LITERACY AND LEARNING

Amanda Blackmore

This chapter reports on a survey of distance education students in Years 6 to 10 enrolled in the Education Department of Western Australia's Distance Education Centre in Perth and the Education Department's Carnarvon, Kalgoorlie, Kimberley, Meekatharra and Port Hedland schools of the air. The survey forms were developed and trialed with the assistance of the Open Access Centre in South Australia. On the basis of this pilot work, the survey forms were distributed to all of the students whose current addresses were held by the Distance Education Centre or by the schools of the air.

Two parallel survey forms were distributed: a form for students, and a form for adults who had a role in the supervision of a distance education student. The survey was designed to collect quantitative information on home and school literacy practices. In addition to collecting demographic data about students, the students' survey was designed to collect information about students' learning practices. These questions asked the amount of time spent on school work each day, the amount of supervision provided by home tutors, the role of home tutors in checking work before it was dispatched to school, and the strategies students used when they required help with their distance learning. In addition to questions about learning practices, the students' survey sought information on students' reading, writing, viewing and computer use. Finally, an attempt was made to explore the relationship between the students' English grades and various literacy and learning practices. The adult form of the survey sought information about family literacy practices, and about the adults' reading, writing, viewing and computer use. An attempt was also made to explore the relationship between the students' English grades and adult literacy practices.

Student Responses

The respondents to the questionnaire were divided into five categories, each of which might be expected to show a different pattern of home and school literacy practices. The numbers of respondents in each of these categories are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Response rates in each category

Category	Number distributed	Number (%) of valid returns
Country	148	63 (43)
Overseas	72	23 (32)
Traveller	49	18 (36)
Referral	100	31 (31)
Adult	53	21 (40)
Total	422	156 (37)

The first category, *country*, consists of country children who depend on distance education because they live too far away from regular schools. The second category, *overseas*, consists of children who are living overseas and whose parents or guardians prefer them to continue with an Australian school curriculum. The third category, *traveller*, consists of children of itinerant families. Some of these families follow itinerant rural occupations such as shooting or shearing, and others are travelling on extended holidays. The fourth category, called *referral*, consists of students who have been referred to distance education because there are medical or social reasons why they cannot enrol in regular schools. *Adults*, the final group consists of adults who are taking Year 10 subjects by distance education.

The ages and year levels of respondents, the time they have been studying by distance education, and the percentages of females are shown in Table 10. All children but one were at least 10 years of age, with the children who had been referred to distance education being slightly older than the other non-adult groups. Country children tended to have been studying with distance education longer than respondents in the other categories; however, some travellers had been in distance education for several years. Female respondents outnumbered males, particularly in the adult category.

Table 10

Ages, year levels, time in distance education, and percentage of females in each category

Category	Age mean (range)	Year level mean (range)	Months in distance education mean (range)	Percentage of females
Country	12 (8-16)	7 (6-10)	38 (2-103)	54
Overseas	12 (10-16)	7 (6-10)	17 (2-79)	65
Traveller	13 (10-16)	8 (6-10)	16 (0-129)	50
Referral	14 (11-22)	9 (6-10)	9 (1-45)	62
Adult	28 (15-49)	10 (10-10)	16 (2-46)	86

Schoolwork Practices

The average numbers of hours that respondents reported spending on their schoolwork each day, as shown in Table 11, fell into two clusters: children—who were studying full-time—reported spending about 4 to 6 hours on average per day, whereas adults—who were taking only one or two subjects—reported spending an hour or two each day on their distance education schoolwork.

Table 11

Average time spent each day on school work by respondents in each category

Category	Average hours spent each day on schoolwork mean (range)
Country	5.7 (3.0-9.0)
Overseas	5.7 (1.0-8.0)
Traveller	4.3 (1.0-7.0)
Referral	4.2 (1.0-10.0)
Adult	1.9 (0.2-5)

Respondents were asked about their work habits: first, whether they had a regular timetable and, if so, how often it was interrupted. Figure 8 shows the percentages of respondents in each category who answered this question in various ways. It is important to note that the figure shows *percentages* and not *numbers* of respondents. For example, Figure 8 shows that about the same percentages of country and overseas children had regular timetables, but it is important to remember that, although the two bars are as tall as each other, the first represents 63 country children and the second represents only 23 overseas children (as indicated in Table 1). Percentages rather than numbers were chosen in Figure 7 to facilitate comparison of *proportions* of students responding in different ways across the categories.

Figure 8 shows that about 80% of country children and overseas students have a regular timetable. For most of these children, this timetable is interrupted less than once a week. Over half of the travellers also have a regular timetable. On the other hand, most adults and most students who have been referred to distance education have no regular timetable. Several parents of children in the referral category wrote comments about the difficulty of keeping a regular timetable because of their children's illnesses.

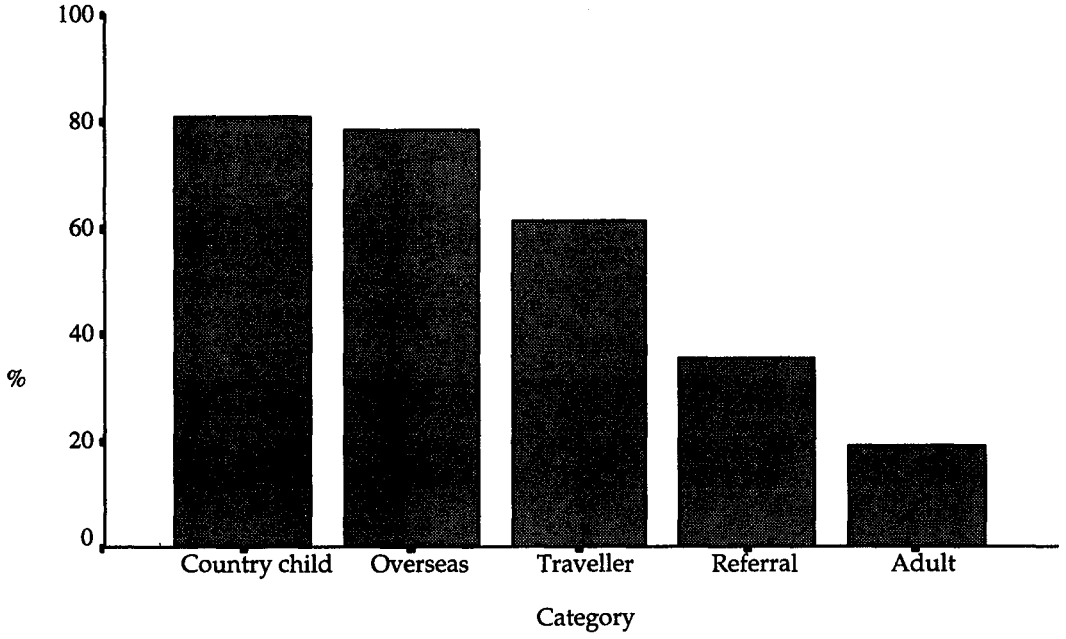

Figure 8. **Percentages of respondents in each category with a regular timetable**

Figure 9 indicates that about half of the respondents were usually supervised by an adult, the exception, not surprisingly, being the adult category who normally worked without adult supervision.

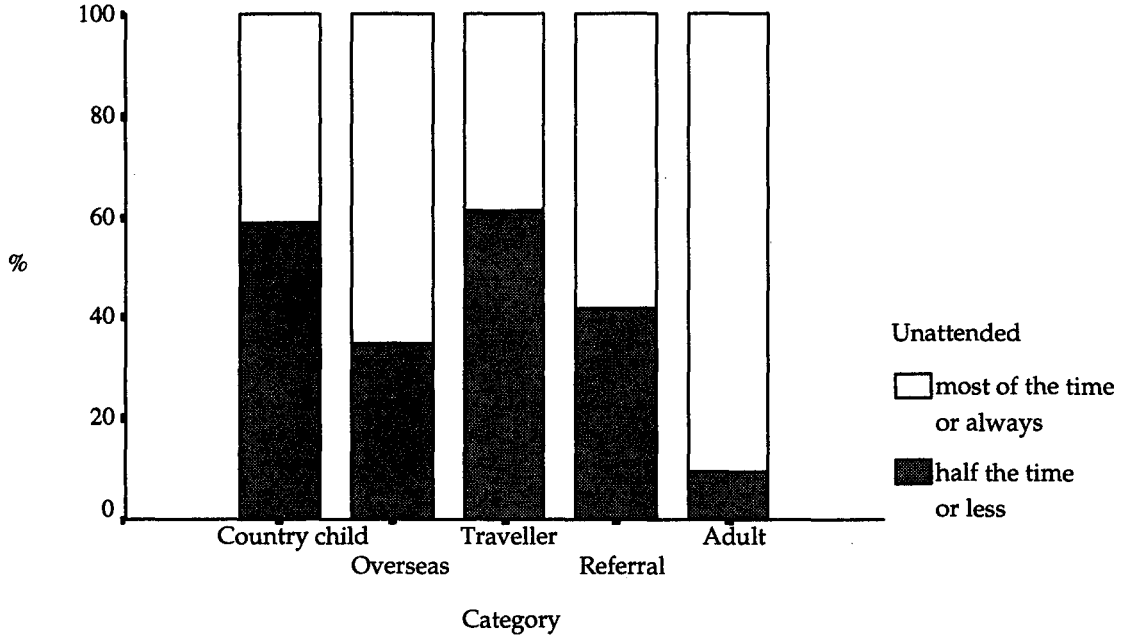

Figure 9. **Percentages of respondents in each category who work unattended by an adult**

When respondents were supervised by an adult, it was usually the student's mother, as indicated in Table 12. Included under the heading "Other" were:

stepmother, grandmother, sister, and aunt (for country children and referred children), and spouse (for one of the adults).

Table 12
Supervision of respondents in each category

Category	No adult supervision	Mother	Father	Paid tutor or teacher	Other
Country	2 (3)	46 (73)	2 (3)	12 (19)	1 (2)
Overseas	2(9)	16 (69)	2 (9)	3 (13)	0 (0)
Traveller	1 (6)	17 (94)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Referral	6 (19)	16 (52)	2 (6)	4 (13)	3 (10)
Adult	18 (85)	1(5)	0 (0)	1 (5)	1 (5)

Note: Figures in brackets are percentages of each category

Figure 10 shows that most of the respondents in the child categories usually had an adult check their work before sending it off.

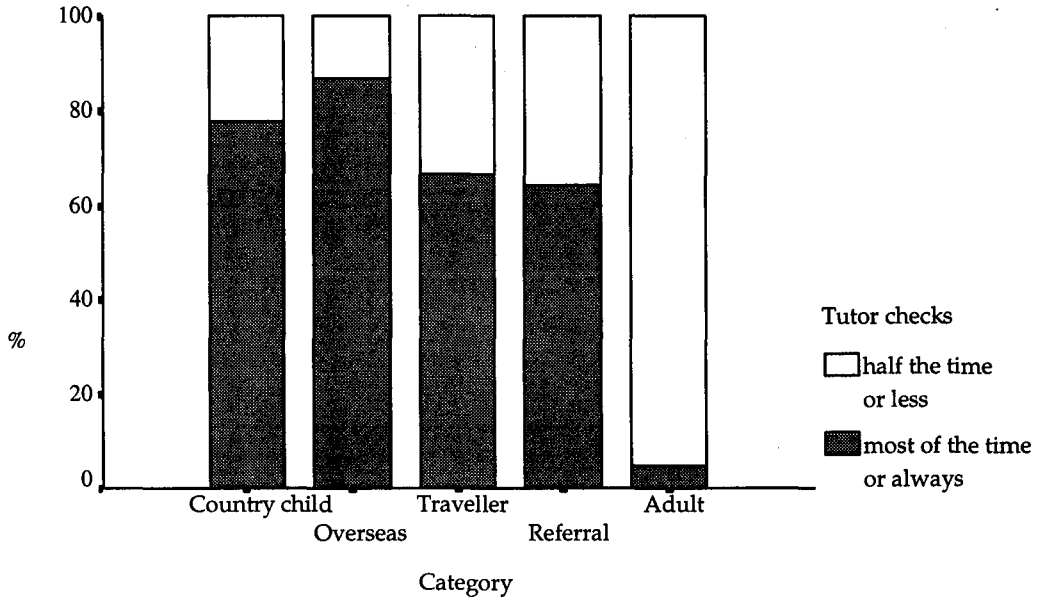

Figure 10. **Percentages of respondents in each category who had their work checked before sending it off**

Respondents were asked to indicate what they did when they found their schoolwork difficult. They were given the five choices shown in Figure 4 and were asked to rank them from 1 to 5. In Figure 11, a ranking of 5 indicates the action they would most often take and a ranking of 1 indicates the action they would least often take. In Figure 11 the data have been combined for all categories, showing that most respondents did not ring up their teacher until they had exhausted the other options This pattern tended to be true of all categories, the main differences between categories being that overseas students were less likely to phone their teacher than other students; and adults, travellers, and referrals rarely asked help from a teacher or tutor who was with them, presumably because these groups had least access to tutors.

Several parents wrote comments indicating that their children preferred to work independently as far as possible and ask their parents for help only when they could go no further by themselves. The option of phoning a teacher is apparently not always feasible: One parent wrote: "We cannot ring the teacher and ask for help, while we are outside WA (008 Number does not apply, and it's too expensive for us). It would be very helpful if we could occasionally".

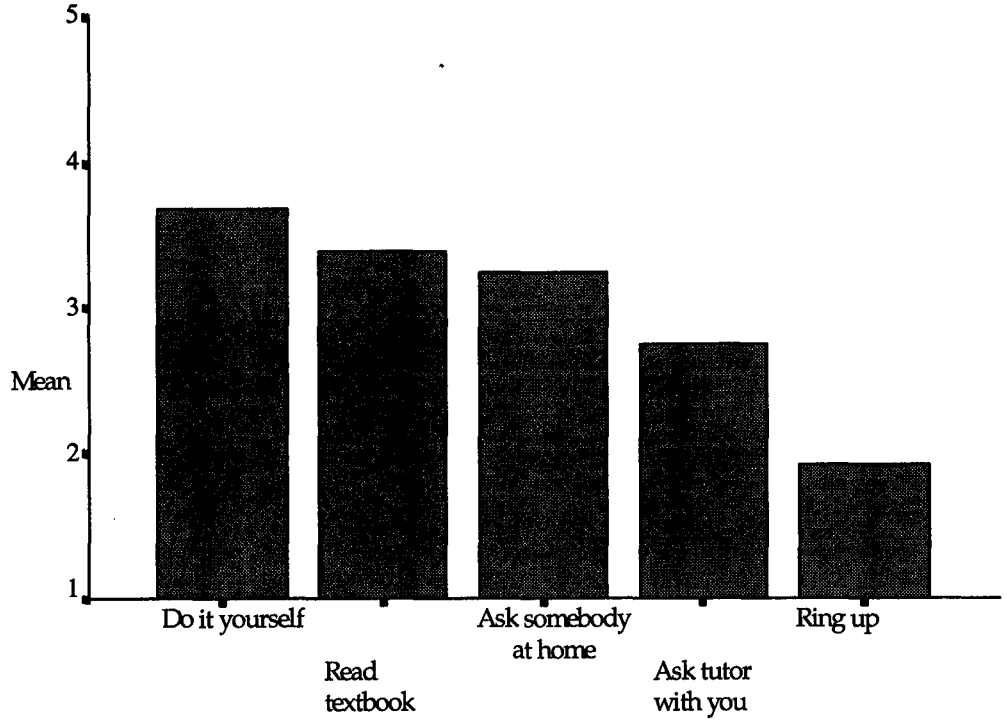

Figure 11. **Mean rankings of actions taken when respondents found schoolwork difficult**

Figure 12 shows the percentages of students in all categories who made use of various technologies to do their schoolwork. The telephone was used by most country children and referrals, and computers were used by two thirds of country children; but most other methods were rarely used. Figure 12 indicates, in particular, that very few respondents used Email, interactive television or telematics. Use of Email may even be overestimated in this study: a number of respondents crossed out the "E" or wrote "Australia Post" against this option and ticked the box, indicating that they thought the question was about the postal service rather than electronic mail. It seems likely that many of those respondents who did *not* write anything against this option believed the same because such respondents often indicated that they did not use a computer. Therefore, in scoring this item, a tick against "Email" was taken as a valid response only if the student indicated that a computer was also used.

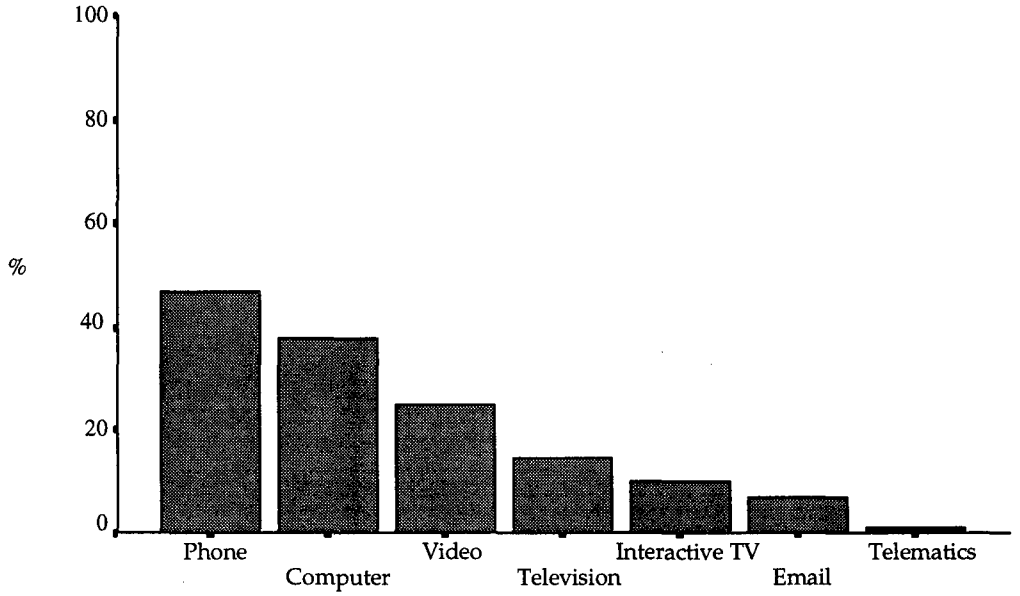

Figure 12. **Percentage of respondents in each category who used various kinds of equipment for their schoolwork**

Leisure Time Literacy Practices

Respondents were asked to indicate how often they read books, newspapers and magazines, and how often they wrote (outside of schoolwork). The percentages who indicated that they did these things at least once a week are shown in Figure 13. About 40% of all respondents read books every day, with little variation from this figure among the categories. Overall, 4% indicated that they never read books. Magazines and newspapers were read every day by 34% of the total sample, and 16% reported that they did some writing every day, apart from schoolwork.

There was enormous variation in the number of books that respondents and their supervisors reported having. Table 13 shows that students' books ranged from 0 to 2000! The mean number of books is not a good indication of the "average" number of books because it tends to be artificially high due to the respondents who reported having thousands of books. Therefore *medians* rather than *means* are given in Table 13. The median is a better indication of the average than the mean because it is not affected by these extremes. Table 5, therefore, shows that 50% of country and overseas children had more than 80 books at home and 50% had less; and that 50% of travellers and referrals had more than 50 books and 50% had less. (Travellers sometimes indicated how many books they had with them and how many they had at home. When they did this, the number that they had at home was the number used for Table 5.) Supervisors usually had more books than students, on average about 200, but, as in the case of students' books, the most striking thing to observe in Table 13 is the range—5 to 6500! These results highlight the need for a curriculum that caters for a wide diversity of students. Because of the wide range of students, it is not sufficient to aim at the so-called "average" child, or even at the bottom-of-the-range child in an effort to cater for all students, because such approaches may fail to teach or motivate students at the other extreme.

Table 13
Numbers of books of respondents in each category

Category	Student's books median (range)	Supervisor's books median (range)
Country	80 (0-2000)	250 (10-2000)
Overseas	81 (0-550)	210 (50-850)
Traveller	50 (3-750)	150 (5-6500)
Referral	50 (4-600)	200 (40-3000)
Adult	88 (20-2000)	

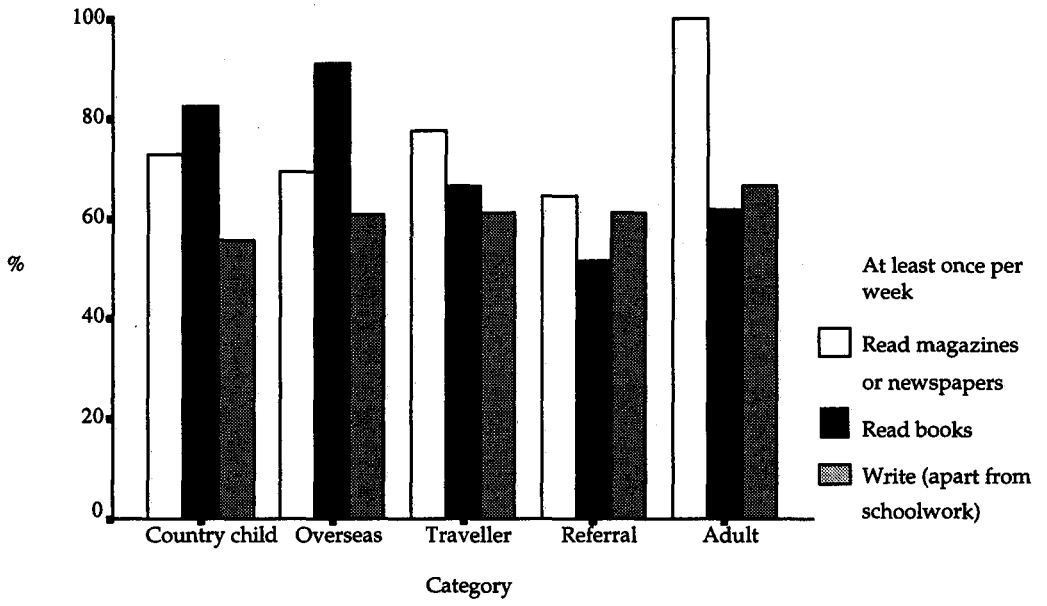

Figure 13: **Percentage of respondents in each category who engaged in various kinds of reading and writing activities at least once a week**

Some students may not have had many books at home but may have used a library instead, and so they were asked when they last visited a library. As in the previous question, there was a wide range of responses: 27% indicating that they had visited a library in the past two weeks; 27% that they had visited a library 2 weeks to 3 months ago; 26% that they had visited a library 3 to 12 months ago; and 20% not within the past 12 months. There was no evidence that children with more books were either more or less likely to have visited a library recently. The least recent library visits were made by overseas students, and three of the overseas respondents wrote on their questionnaires that "libraries are not a priority" and that there was "no library available" where they were living. Another wrote, "we are grateful for the use of Distance Education Centre Library Resource Centre".

Respondents were also asked about their viewing habits, both television and video. Their responses are shown in Table 14 and Figure 14 respectively. Respondents in remote areas commented that their access to television "depends on weather" or that they had "no TV", so it is perhaps not surprising that the number of hours they reported watching television was less than might be expected of an urban sample. On the whole, adults reported watching somewhat less television than students. Because of their remoteness, it was expected that respondents might watch more videos instead of television: overall, 41% of respondents watched videos at least once a week, the rates being somewhat higher among referrals and overseas students than in the other categories.

Table 14

Hours per day for which students and adults in each category reported watching television

Category	Hours of student television watching. mean (range)	Hours of adult television watching. mean (range)
Country	1.9 (1.0-5.0)	1.3 (0.0-5.0)
Overseas	1.9 (0.0-6.0)	1.2 (0.0-4.0)
Traveller	1.2 (0.0-5.0)	1.2 (0.0-6.0)
Referral	3.1 (0.0-8.0)	1.5 (0.0-4.0)
Adult	2.0 (0.0-4.0)	

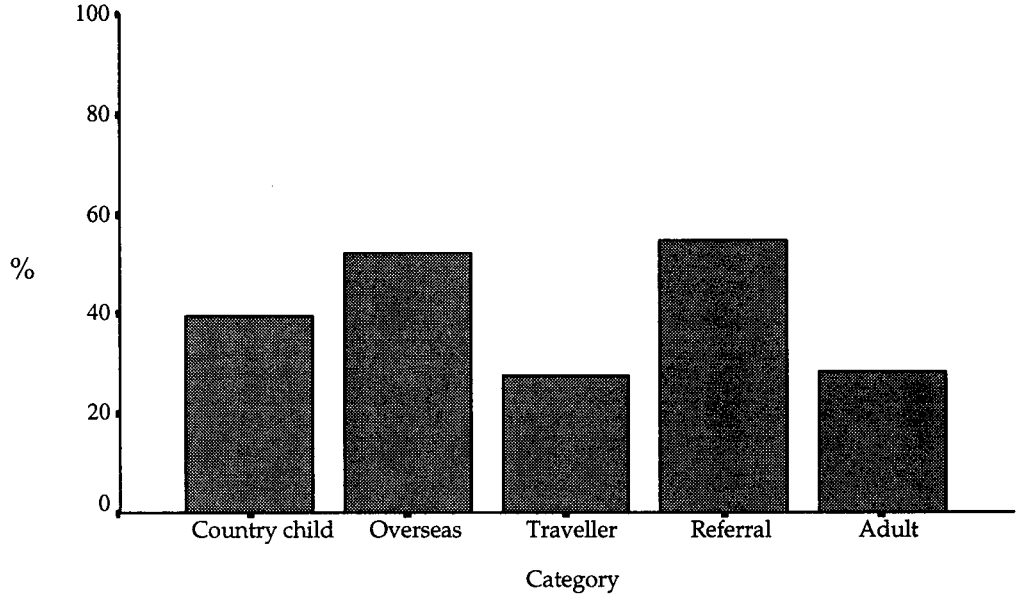

Figure 14. **Percentages of respondents in each category who viewed videos at least once a week**

As shown in Figure 15, most country children, referred children and overseas students and about half of the adult students of distance education used computers other than for schoolwork, but a minority used them more than once a week. Table 15 shows that in most categories, computers were most

commonly used for games and word processing; and small proportions of respondents used the other kinds of software shown in Table 15.

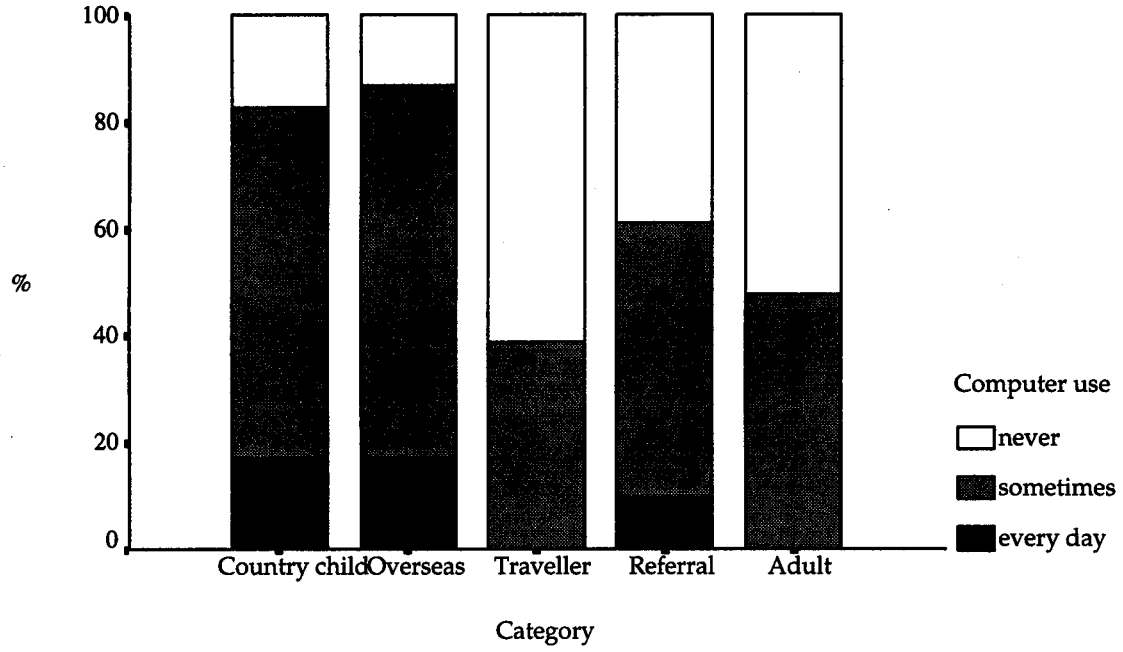

Figure 15: **Frequency of computer use outside schoolwork by respondents in each category**

Table 15

Computer programmes used by respondents in each category

Category	Word Processor	Games	Educational games	Spreadsheets	Drawing programs	Integrated software	Programming	Hypercard
Country	14 (22)	37 (59)	7 (11)	3 (5)	8 (13)	16 (25)	4(6)	18 (29)
Traveller	2 (11)	6 (33)	3 (17)	1 (6)	1 (6)	1 (6)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Overseas	13 (56)	14 (61)	4 (17)	0 (0)	5 (22)	0 (0)	1 (4)	0 (0)
Referral	7 (23)	10 (32)	1 (3)	1 (3)	1 (3)	2 (6)	2 (6)	0 (0)
Adult	6 (29)	5 (24)	0 (0)	2 (10)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (5)	0 (0)

Note: Figures in brackets are percentages of each category

English Grades

The English grades of many of the respondents were not available, often because they had not been in distance education long enough to have obtained a grade in English. Therefore, it was not possible to analyse the data in the five categories given above. All but the country and overseas student categories contained only 2 to 11 children with grades. Obviously, these numbers are far too small to draw conclusions about the population. Therefore, only the country and overseas student categories were used in the following analyses. There were 86 respondents in these two categories and grades were obtained

for 69 of them. Figure 16 shows the percentage of children who obtained each grade.

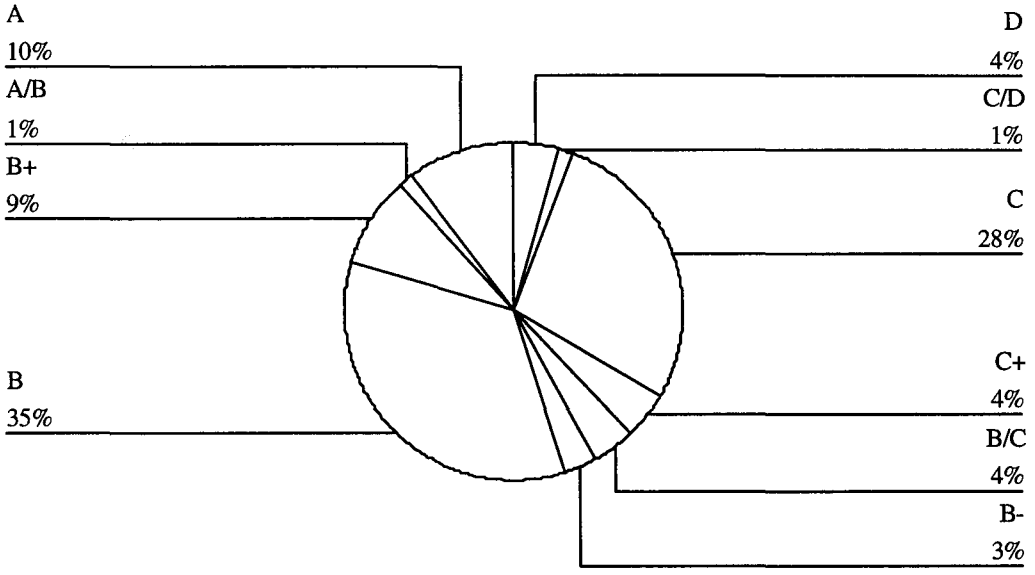

Figure 16. **Percentages of children who obtained each English grade**

It was expected that respondents' schoolwork practices and their leisure time practices with literature and other media may predict their performance in English. To determine this, correlations between English grade and other variables were calculated, and are shown in Table 16. The correlation coefficients shown in the second column of the table indicate how strongly English grade is associated with each of the variables in the first column of the table. A correlation coefficient approaching 1 or -1 would indicate a strong association with English grade; a correlation approaching 0 would indicate a weak association. Asterisks indicate that the correlation coefficient is statistically significant, that is, that there is probably a reliable association between that variable and English grade (though the association, in some cases, may be quite weak). The more asterisks, the more reliable the association.

The majority of the variables shown in Table 16 were *not* significantly correlated with English grade. The strongest predictor of English grade was frequency of reading books (other than for school). Children who read books the most were somewhat more likely to obtain higher English grades. There was also a weak negative correlation between year level and English grade, indicating that grades tended to be a bit lower for higher year levels than for lower year levels. However, it should be noted that even those correlations marked with an asterisk as being statistically significant, are moderately low, and therefore knowledge of students' practices with literature and other media predict very little about the grades these students are likely to obtain in English.

Table 16

Correlations between English grade and other variables

Variable	Correlation with English grade
General	
Gender	.1982
Year level	-.2840*
Time in distance education	.0663
Schoolwork practices	
Hours per day spent on schoolwork	.1420
Regularity of Timetable	.1401
Attendance by adult during schoolwork	-.0136
Frequency with which home tutor checks work	.2095
Priority given to asking somebody at home for help when schoolwork is difficult	.1925
Priority given to reading the textbook when schoolwork is difficult	-.0420
Priority given to ringing up the teacher when schoolwork is difficult	-.1816
Priority given to asking a teacher or tutor who is with the respondent when schoolwork is difficult	.0429
Priority given to doing as much as possible alone when schoolwork is difficult	-.0020
Leisure time literature and other media practices	
Frequency of reading books	.3537**
Number of books	-.0822
Frequency of reading newspapers or magazines	-.1200
Frequency of consulting an encyclopaedia	-.1752
Frequency of writing (apart from schoolwork)	.0558
Hours spent watching television	-.1765
Frequency of video viewing	.0544
Recency of last visit to a library	.0428
Frequency of computer use (other than for school)	.0896

*p<.05 **p<.01

Adult Responses

The adults in the children's families most closely involved in their schoolwork were also asked to respond to some questions concerning their practices with print and other media and their interactions with their children. *Adult* students of distance education were not required to answer these questions, but all other respondents (except for three referrals and one country child) answered them. Therefore, the numbers in each category for the results reported below are the same as those in Table 9, except that (a) that there are 28 (not 31) responses in the referral category, (b) that there are 62 (not 63) in the country children category and (c) that there are none in the adult category.

Table 12, above, indicated that the person who supervised the child's schoolwork was almost always the mother. Not surprisingly, therefore, 84% of questionnaires to the adult in the child's family most closely involved in their schoolwork were completed by the mother, 10% by the father, and a few others by home tutors, a stepmother, a sister, a grandmother, and a carer.

Just over half (53%) of the respondents indicated that their occupation consisted of home duties; 9% were pastoralists; 10% were lecturers, teachers, principals or tutors; and the remainder had a wide range of occupations including managers of hotels and caravan parks, secretaries, self-employed business people, nurses, and cleaners.

Supervision

Figure 17 shows that most children, and particularly country and overseas children, were supervised every day. Children who had been referred to distance education tended to be less closely supervised—18% indicating that they were never supervised. While there were many comments, commending the materials provided in distance education, there was also a number of comments describing the time and effort required to be a home tutor, particularly when children had learning difficulties. Problems of supervision were also sometimes exacerbated by the amount of time that it takes for teachers' feedback to reach students. This is particularly so for travellers who may find that their mail follows them from one town to the next.

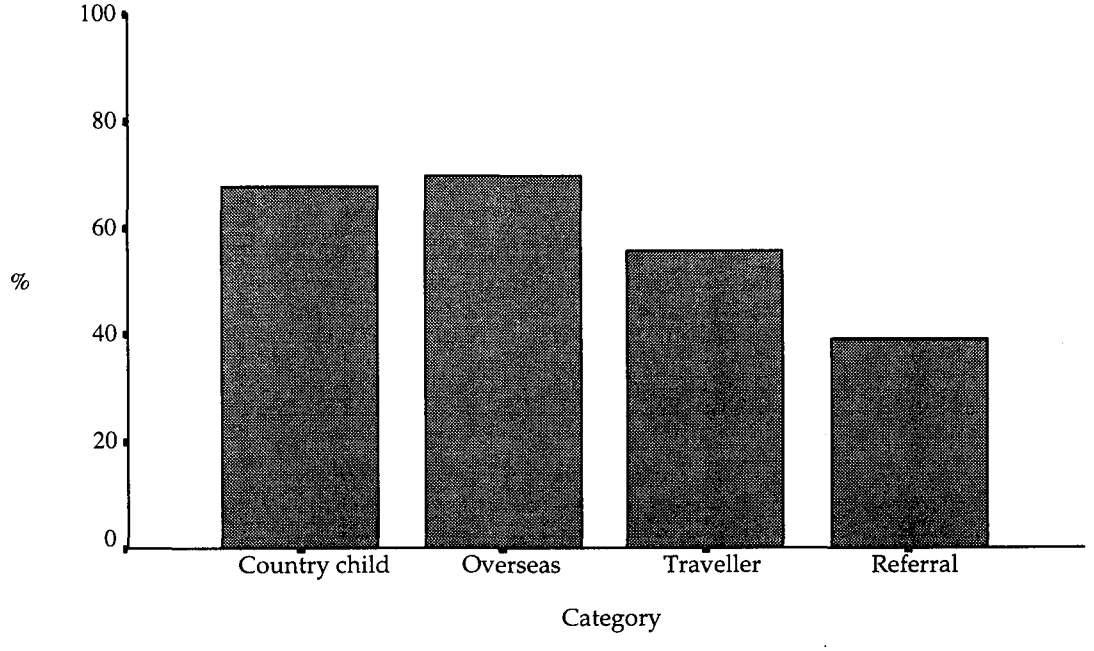

Figure 17. **Percentages respondents in each category who were supervised every day**

Respondents were asked to indicate which, of a variety of activities, they had done with any of their children in the previous week. Table 17 shows the

numbers and percentages of respondents in each category who indicated that they had done these activities. Most adults reported that they had directed one of their children to a book to answer a question, discussed with one of their children something he or she had been reading and something the adult had been reading, and discussed something on television or video.

Table 17

Activities done in the last week by respondents

Activity	N (%)
Talked to one of your children about something s/he has been reading	111 (84.7)
Discussed something that you have watched on television or video	100 (76.3)
Told one of your children to go to a book to find the answer to a question s/he has asked	98 (74.8)
Talked to one of your children about something you have been reading	85 (64.9)
Read aloud together	69 (52.7)
Did any writing together	65 (49.6)
Discussed something that you have heard on the radio	57 (43.5)
Consulted a book together to find out how to do something around the house or property	44 (33.6)
Played games on a computer together	32 (24.4)

Print and Other Media Practices

Like the distance education students, the adults were asked about their practices with print and other media. The numbers of books that adults had in their homes were given earlier in Table 13, with the responses of students to a similar question. The percentages of adults who read books every day are shown in Figure 18. Overall, slightly less than half (46%) of the adults reported reading books every day.

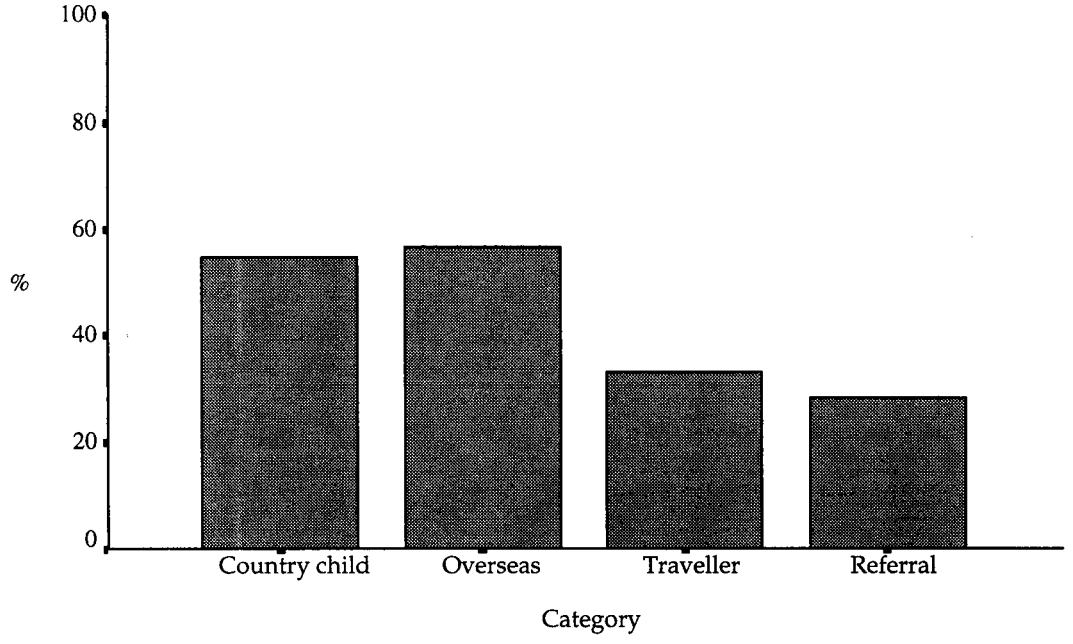

Figure 18. **Percentage of adult respondents in each category who read books every day**

All respondents (except for one adult in the referral category) reported doing some writing in the week prior to completing the questionnaire. Table 19 shows that the most common writing done by adults consisted of letters and work-related writing. Other kinds of writing included word puzzles and crosswords, report writing for children's schoolwork, books and articles, translations, shopping lists and "to do" lists, messages, faxes, official forms, and preparation of classes.

Table 19

Writing done in the last week by adult respondents in each category

Writing	N (%)
Letters	96 (73.3)
Work-related	86 (65.5)
Personal journal	30 (22.9)
Tertiary studies	12 (9.2)
Other	26 (19.8)

Apart from print, adults were also asked about their practices with television, video, and radio. The time adults spent watching television was shown above in Table 14 with students' responses to the same question. On average, adults reported watching television for 1.4 hours per day, and 22% watched videos at least once a week, the majority (59%) watching them less than once a week.

Overall, 96% of respondents reported listening to the radio. News and current affairs and music were by far the most common kinds of programs. Other programs included sports, quiz shows, a science program, comedy, the country hour, and multicultural radio. Several respondents in the country

commented on the difficulty in reception of radio programmes, and several overseas respondents commented that they did not listen to radio much because the radio programmes were not in English. Several respondents also commented that they played their own tapes of music and stories instead of or as well as listening to radio.

Adults' Print and Media Practices and Students' English Grades

In order to determine whether adults' print and media practices predicted children's performance in English, correlations between English grade and adults' responses were calculated. Table 20 shows that adults who read together with one of their children and who talked to one of their children about something they had read were more likely to have children who achieved higher English grades. Also, the greater the number of ways (as assessed in this study) in which adults interacted with one of their children in regard to reading and writing, the more likely they were to have a child who achieved higher English grades. However, like the correlations in Table 16, these correlations are all quite small.

Table 20

Correlations between English grade and adult variables

Variable	Correlation with English grade
Adult print and media practices	
Frequency of reading books	.2041
Number of books	.0730
Hours spent watching television	-.1247
Frequency of video viewing	.1498
Supervision of child's schoolwork	
Frequency of supervision of child's schoolwork	.0793
Interactions between adult and child in last week	
Adult told child to go to a book to find the answer to a question	.1754
Adult talked to child about something the child had been reading	.1127
Adult talked to child about something the adult had been reading	.2618*
Adult and child consulted a book together to find out how to do something around the house or property	.1613
Adult and child read aloud together	.3246**
Adult and child did writing together	.1421
Adult and child discussed something they had seen on television or video	-.0749
Adult and child discussed something they had heard on the radio	-.1289
Adult and child played games on computer together	-.0506
Total number of activities (listed above) done in the last week	.2330*

*p<.05 **p<.01

Conclusion

One hundred and fifty-six distance education students in Years 6 to 10 responded to the questionnaire. This represented an overall response rate of 37%, which *may* indicate that the results reported here are based on those students of distance education who are more interested than average in home literacy practices or adults who are more involved than average in the distance education of their children.

Respondents either depended on distance education fully for their schooling (as in the case of country children, overseas children, children who had been referred to distance education, and travellers around Australia) or were doing only one or two subjects with distance education (as in the case of adults). The students, particularly the adults, were mainly female.

Students who depended on distance education fully for their schooling spent 4 to 6 hours a day, on average, on their schoolwork, had a regular timetable, and most were supervised at least half of the time by an adult, usually the student's mother, who normally checked the student's work before it was sent off. When they encountered difficulties, students tended to try to do as much as possible alone before seeking help from others, and particularly from their distance education teachers. There was very little use of such technology as video, television, interactive television, telematics or Email for schoolwork. Two-thirds of country children used a computer for their schoolwork, but only a minority of students in the other categories used a computer. Outside of schoolwork, computers were used mainly for word processing and games.

When asked about their leisure time literacy and media practices, nearly half of respondents reported reading books every day, apart from schoolwork. A small proportion of children (4%) reported never reading books other than for schoolwork. Frequency of book reading was the only home literacy practice of students that significantly predicted English grade, though the association was rather weak. The numbers of books children reported having varied enormously, from no books to 2,000 books, indicating the wide diversity of educational needs these students have. Library visits were quite frequent, considering the remoteness of many respondents; most had visited a library within the past 3 months. Students reported viewing television for 2 hours a day, on average, and nearly half viewed videos at least once a week.

The adults in the students' families most closely associated with their schoolwork were asked about their home literacy practices and interactions with their children. Adults who had read aloud with their children or who had discussed something that they themselves had been reading with their children were slightly more likely to have students who scored highly in English.

Only 46% of the adults reported reading books every day; however, they reported doing a wide variety of writing activities in the week prior to completing the questionnaire. They reported viewing television, on average

for 1.4 hours per day; 22% viewed videos at least once a week; and almost all listened to the radio.

Most of the factors investigated in this study did not predict students' English grades. Most of those that did were directly related to practices with books, including the frequency with which students read books; whether their home supervisor read aloud with any of the children in the household; whether their home supervisor discussed things that he or she had been reading with any of the children in the household; and the number of ways in which their home supervisor interacted with any of the children in regard to reading and writing. However, all associations with English grades were quite weak.

CHAPTER 7
CASE STUDY 1: OWEN ABRAHAMS

Judith Rivalland

Owen lives with his aunt and uncle, Mr and Mrs Riley, who have took over his guardianship when his foster parents passed away in 1993. Owen is 13 years old. He and his younger sister Mary, one adult daughter and her husband, and four grandchildren live with Mr and Mrs Riley. The family lives on a farm, which used to be an Aboriginal settlement, located several hours drive from Perth. Mr Riley manages the farm and Mrs Riley works for a community development program. "We do everything, you know, like sheep work and everything really," she said. "Like, at the moment, my sister and I are making an Aboriginal-coloured doona with hexagons". Owen and the younger children all travel to a local primary school by bus. Owen is in Year 8. Along with two other non-Aboriginal high school students, Owen is studying through distance education in a special room assigned to them.

Mr and Mrs Riley were born on the farm and have lived in the district all of their lives. They speak English most of the time, however they do use some Noongar and Yamagee words scattered through their normal conversation. "I mean, all this tradition is more or less lost around here but, yeah, we speak it sometimes. You know, we talk English and then something will pop up, some word, you know like, you'll put your shoes on, your jinnas, or something like that you know". Mr Riley finished Year 6 at primary school and Mrs Riley completed Year 9 at high school. Mrs Riley explained that she had "learnt a lot" by herself. "I mean, I didn't have to have a diploma to get a job at Community Services," she said. "I just had to have my head".

Before Owen lived with Mr and Mrs Riley, he attended a high school in a nearby town. He had spent much of his time truanting from school. As a consequence of his lack of success and poor attendance, he had been involved in a number of minor criminal offences. During the time when he was in trouble with the police, Des, a local police officer, took an interest in his welfare. With the support of Des and the local co-ordinator of distance education at Gadgerup, Owen decided to leave the high school and study by distance education. He has received an enormous amount of help from Des and the local community. Des visits the school room most days and spends as much time as possible supervising Owen's work. He has become Owen's mentor. Des spends many of his evenings at Owen's home supervising his homework. On weekends they often go to Perth to stay with Des's own parents. Mrs Riley is delighted with the progress Owen has made. "I mean, if he was [at the high school] he would be one of those casualties down at Longmore I suppose (*laughs*)". Longmore is a juvenile detention centre in

Perth. She explained why it was better for Owen to study at the primary school:

> I really like how this school is set up because, you know, this is a thing we never had in [the high school]. I mean, see the big schools, you know, teachers don't know you as much as, here they know you on one to-one, and you're like one big family kind of thing you know. I'm all in agreeance with that because you know, everybody is very good friends with everybody else and you don't get this little nastiness, you know.

Later in the conversation, Mrs Riley returned to the value of distance learning:

> No, I've got no gripes about distance education. I think that's the best thing that could ever happen to really any kid and, you know, they're not like locked up in classroom and have to go from one room to do one, program or whatever they call it, and then to another room to do something else, and another room to do something else.

Aspirations

Mrs Riley is keen to give Owen every opportunity possible. "I'd like Owen to be something because Owen has never ever had a good home until now," she said. She hopes that he might finish Year 12 and perhaps gain tertiary entrance. Mrs Riley would really like her children to have some of the opportunities that were unavailable to her. However, she is not sure how realistic her hopes may be. She discussed her expectations:

MRS RILEY:	Well I'd like them to be something, be somebody, you know, have their.. like get a job and get a good job, that pays good and have their own car and maybe one day buy their own house, and I like them to learn to budget money and not just be a freelance sort of thing.
INT:	Do you expect them to finish high school and go on to year twelve?
MRS RILEY:	Yeah, yeah, by all means.
INT:	And do you expect them to go on to, say TAFE or tertiary study in some way, or do you think that..? What would your expectations be?
MRS RILEY:	Well in all honesty, I really think that if they're not doing too good in school, I mean, the only thing to do, you know, if they've got no interest in school, they want to work well, let them, you know.

Although Mrs Riley prefers living in the country, she believes it will be up to Owen to decide whether or not he wants to stay in the country once he finishes

school. She said, "he makes his own decisions. Really he's got a mind of his own".

Family Literacy Practices

Reading

Owen has only learnt to read effectively since the beginning of the year, so he still finds reading "hard work". He does not enjoy reading very much and does not often read for pleasure. He enjoys reading Bruce Lee magazines and mainly looks at the pictures in Asterix comics and books. Owen does not have many books in his home library and never goes to the public library, although when Des takes him to Perth he sometimes takes him to the distance education library. He is learning to enjoy books as his reading skills improve, but he only likes reading "boy's books". He quite enjoyed *Cannily Cannily* which he had to read for English but he was not keen to read *Playing Beattie Bow* because he perceived it as a "girl's" book. For him reading has already become a gendered activity, which influences his choice of texts.

Mrs Riley enjoys reading, particularly magazines and newspapers. She reads *That's Life* and the *Post*. She also enjoys reading novels about Aboriginal people and has a small collection of such novels at home. She recently read *Aboriginals, Yamagees of the Gascoyne*. Mr Riley, she said, "only reads the paper because he's got a numeracy and literacy problem".

Writing

There is not a great deal of writing done in the Riley household. Mrs Riley enjoys doing the crosswords in *That's Life*, and she spends about one hour per week working on the household accounts. Mrs Riley tries to ensure that the children complete any homework they have been set. Although the children are expected to do their homework by themselves, she will assist when they ask. A special tutor is paid by the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme to provide after-school homework tutoring twice a week. Owen goes with the other children to the tutor's home on those occasions. On the other days, Des is usually there to help him. Mrs Riley explained what usually happens:

> When Des is there, he makes Owen do his homework, and I sit and just watch because, you know, the things now are not the homework that we used to do, or really we never used to do any homework, in all honesty (*laughs*).

Television and Computing

The Riley family do not have a home computer. In order to cater for the different ages of the family members, they have four televisions in the home. On weekends, the children are permitted to watch their own programs in their bed-rooms, but on week nights their televisions are often unplugged because they tend to stay up too late. The family all enjoy watching *Home and Away*

together and they frequently watch the news. Owen likes to watch *Power Rangers* but he usually goes to bed early on weekdays.

The children have purchased quite a large collection of videos which the whole family watch regularly. Also Mrs Riley usually hires a video whenever she goes in to town. The family have purchased a copy of a video made by an Aboriginal affairs authority in which the moving of the local Aboriginal reserve was documented. Because it records their family history, this video is obviously of great interest to the family:

> I've also got videos on when we used to stay in [the Reserve] and when we shifted, like they were taken when the houses got knocked down, and so when we shifted to the town and how we settled in our home and they come back six months later and had an interview with us and stuff.

Doing Distance Education

The primary school has a principal, two teachers and a registrar. Elaine, the registrar, co-ordinates the distance education students at the school. She was instrumental in the establishment of the centre for which she sought private funding, in order to purchase the demountable in which the students work. Elaine organises the centre and rosters some of the parents and Des, the police officer. There is usually one adult on duty in the centre to assist the children when necessary. The demountable is a large airy room, with carpet on the floor and attractive modern desks for each of the four children studying by distance education. There is a fax machine and a hands-free telephone in one corner of the room, to which the children have access any time they wish. A computer is located in another corner of the room. The desks are arranged in separate areas around the room with the supervisor's desk set in the centre of the room. The room has a friendly and informal air about it, because the students appear to have established a supportive relationship with each other. Visitors move in and out of the classroom interacting with the children in an informal manner. This contrasts strongly with the hierarchical relationships often evident in high schools. The students all have their own personal notice boards on which photographs of their teachers and their timetables are pinned. The students move around the school without inhibition, going off to the library to watch television broadcasts or to seek references whenever there is a need. Owen is the youngest and least experienced at using distance education materials, so the other more experienced students readily offer him help and support whenever he asks them for assistance.

Elaine and Des both take a great deal of interest in Owen's progress. They have closely monitored his work ever since he started at the centre. Although Elaine is currently the school registrar, she is a trained teacher and has used her teaching skills to help Owen with basic reading, writing and numeracy skills. She felt he was barely able to read and write when he began at the centre, so with the assistance of Des and the other parents she taught him decoding and basic numeracy skills at the same time as he was working on his distance education materials. They feel he picks things up very easily and are

delighted with the rapid progress he has made. Now he is expected to work independently, but they keep a close eye on him to ensure that his concentration is maintained. Des works hard to keep him motivated and to make sure his progress continues.

Owen gives the impression that he is confident about his learning and is making good progress. In order to make judgements about his progress, he relies heavily on feedback from Des and Elaine who make sure his work is completed before it is forwarded to his teachers. He relies heavily on the mark awarded by his teachers, although he is not very interested in their comments. He explained this as follows:

OWEN:	Look at the mark.
INT:	And do you read what they say as well or do you..?
OWEN:	Sometimes.
INT:	So the mark's the most important thing to you, but do you also like to read what their comments are?
OWEN:	Not most of the time.
INT:	And when they tell you to do things that you haven't completed, do you do them? Like if they say to you...
OWEN:	Yeah I get made to do them.
INT:	Who makes you?
OWEN:	Des.

Relationships

Relationships are of paramount importance in maintaining Owen's interest in continuing his schooling. He enjoys a great deal of attention from all of the people involved in the distance education school room. Owen seems to enjoy this attention. Des has established a very strong personal relationship with Owen. Unlike the formal subordinate and superior relationships between teachers and their students, there is a sense of camaraderie between the two of them. This very masculine relationship is evident in the playful social interactions which take place when they are not doing school work; especially through the body language and physical skylarking engaged in by Des and Owen in between the more serious attention given to school activities. At the same time, Des is quite definite and persistent about ensuring that Owen completes his work. Des has developed a practice of determined coaxing which appears to keep Owen motivated and on task. In his role of mentor, Des has almost developed a parental relationship with Owen. He moves from light-heartedly keeping Owen on task to making it clear that some issues are not negotiable. The following exchange between the two of them provides some indication of how their relationship is played out. Notice the familiarity when Owen addresses Des as "sissy" and the way he questions "why" he must do things. The tone and language used in this exchange is quite different

from the dialogue usually found in classrooms. Des ignores all of the evasive moves and demands made by Owen and quietly persists by showing him where to begin his sentence:

OWEN:	Who's that? Hey, why do I have to do English...
DES:	Now.
OWEN:	...twice and maths once.
DES:	Because maths (inaudible) time.
OWEN:	What?
DES:	Eight fifty to nine forty, that's maths for an hour and half, and English you only do thirty minutes.
OWEN:	Hey, sissy, I don't start at eight fifty, I start at nine o'clock.
DES:	Should've been here at eight fifty then shouldn't you? Alright, get your, you'll need two sheets.
OWEN:	Will I?

When the conversation continued after an interruption, Des went on to help Owen. He disregarded Owen's attempts to avoid the task by quietly insisting that the writing be completed while ignoring the protests made by him. In a normal school setting many of Owen's comments could easily have been interpreted as rude or a display of disobedience, however Des disregarded these comments and continued to encourage him to finish his work. Maintaining a balance between being a friend and coaxing Owen to finish his work appears to be an important part of the work done by Des.

DES:	You remember, start there, Mr Fuller...Yes, because, remember you're doing dialogue.
OWEN:	Why?
DES:	Because how are they going to know who's talking?
OWEN:	Yeah but how am I going to write their name in there's, that's too small.
DES:	No, not in there. You just write it here. On the other side of the line. I'd already wrote this so you'd know what to put there.
OWEN:	Number one.
DES:	No don't write one. That's what your sentence is. (*pause 10 secs*). So you write Mrs Grace, alright, no, no, just put dot dot, dot dot there you go and inverted commas, remember, because it's talking. And off you go. Capital letters and all that.

Organisation

A timetable, worked out by Elaine and Des, is kept on Owen's noticeboard. He consults his timetable regularly to see which subjects he should be working on. Usually he keeps to the timetable as much as possible, although the afternoons are sometimes re-organised in order to complete unfinished work. An effort is made to ensure that Owen completes all of his work in the core subjects of English, maths, social studies and science. He finds English the most difficult subject and often has to be coaxed into completing his work. He usually enjoys maths because it does not require as much reading and can be completed quite easily.

The adult supervisor for the day gets Owen started on his work and Des takes over this role whenever he is available. He likes to work afternoon shifts so that he can spend the mornings supervising Owen's work. When Owen meets a problem he usually asks Des for help. However if Des is not there, he tries to work out the problem by himself or telephones his teacher. When he meets a problem he asks for assistance after three or four minutes, in order not to waste too much time.

School Practices

Owen has a very interesting learning style. His main purpose seems to be to complete his work with as little effort as possible, but still to the satisfaction of Des and Elaine. He finds that some of the topics he covers are quite interesting and engages more fully with these particular activities. Nevertheless he appears to be willing to plod on with his work even when he is not interested in it, or finds it arduous. His reading and writing skills are still not highly developed and this often makes it difficult for him to understand his work fully. His reading is laborious. He reads slowly, making numerous miscues, stopping frequently to sound out words and often leaving out unknown words. Despite this apparently inefficient reading behaviour he seems to make enough sense of the text to gain the gist of what he reads, although sometimes his inability to pick up the fine details of the text causes misunderstandings. He has constructed a practice which is surprisingly effective. He often reads his texts aloud as this helps him to understand what he reads. As well he 'has a go' at the task, desperately searching the text for visual clues about how to do the job. Then he takes a guess at the answer and, using a certain amount of intuition, often arrives at the correct solution without necessarily understanding how he derived the answer. Once he has learned how to do something he readily remembers it and makes use of this knowledge when completing other tasks. He explained his "search and guess" strategy to me:

INT:	How did you know where to look for Florence on the map?
OWEN:	I looked for Venice, that word. I looked across to see Florence and Brussels.

INT:	But did you know that Florence was in Italy? Did you already know that or did you just look on the map till you found it?
OWEN:	I just looked on the map until I found it.
INT:	Right. So whereabouts are you going to look for Vienna?
OWEN:	Near Spain (*pause 40 secs*).

Maths

On the morning I visited Owen he began with maths. He was completing a set of activities in a unit called "Train Maths". The activities focussed on reading a map of Europe, calculating distances between cities and estimating the time it would take to complete different journeys within Europe using "the very fast train". He began the task confidently by reading the first page and looking at the Eurail brochure provided to check the location of France. He then did the following activity:

Starting Off

Most people going from Australia to Europe fly to London.

To get from England to the rest of Europe there are several ferry crossings.

1. The most famous ferry goes from Dover in England to Calais in France.

A) Find Calais on the map.

Dover is on the coast of England just above the "C" in "CALAIS'

Write a "D" there.

b) Another ferry crosses to B__, just next to Calais.

c) If you are heading to Paris, you could also cross from England to Dieppe.

What is the first main town you'd go through after landing at Dieppe?

d) If you want to go to Belgium, a ferry crosses from Dover to O.

He read the text quickly and began his "search and guess" approach to the task. His eyes darted all over the map of Europe looking for Dover. He understood that Dover was just above Calais but had not read the text closely enough to realise that it was in England. What is more, he apparently was not

familiar with the countries of Europe and did not know where to look for England on the map. He also had considerable difficulty pronouncing many of the names of European cities. Nevertheless he was happy to persevere with the task and he remembered where many places were from his visual surveying of the map. In the following discussion, notice how Owen initially suggests that Dover is in France just above Calais but then indicates that he doesn't know where England is:

OWEN:	Yeah, you start here, yeah, you start from Dover.
INT:	So have you found Dover?
OWEN:	Yeah, it's just above Calais.
INT:	Above Calais, is it?
OWEN:	There.
INT:	Okay, where is it again, can I have a look?
OWEN:	(inaudible)
INT:	Right. But it says here, Dover is on the coast of England. Is that on the coast of England?
OWEN:	Yes.
INT:	No, is that England there? Where's England?
OWEN:	(inaudible)
INT:	So, if you read this again, it says, 'Find Calais on the map', right, and then it says, 'Dover is on the coast of England,' so you have to go to England and it's on the coast just above C in Calais. So where's the C in Calais? There, so the, Dover is in England, just above that, so that's where you have to put the D. Right. Now if you want to go, so in this one here it says, 'If you want to go to Belgium a ferry crosses from Dover,' so you have to find Dover, and you look to see where you'd go to, to go to Belgium.

Owen was happy to engage in conversation about the task and quickly began to understand more about the layout of Europe. He pressed on with the next task, pleased to have my assistance whenever he confronted a difficulty. He took it for granted that I was there to assist him. After having some difficulty with the pronunciation of Marseille he quickly searched and found it on the map and then successfully answered the following question:

> Find Marseille on the map.
> a) A TVG leaves Paris at 7:30 AM and arrives in Marseille at 12:30 PM (lunchtime)
>
> How long does the trip take?

However he was troubled by the calculations in the next activity (shown below):

An ordinary train leaves Paris at 9:30 AM and arrives in Marseille at 5 PM.

How long does the trip take?

Resolving how to calculate the time difference from AM to PM was problematic. In the following discussion he demonstrated his confusion about dealing with the mathematical processes of subtraction and showed how he adds and subtracts on his fingers when he doesn't use a calculator. Note how he counts onwards by the hour from nine thirty in the morning in order to solve the problem. Unfortunately he has difficulty coping with the half hours:

INT:	So can you tell me how you worked that one out?
OWEN:	I added, nine, I added nine onto that one, (inaudible) so you go from, so I put nine hours and thirty minutes.
INT:	Right. This one's in the morning isn't it? Nine thirty AM and that one's five PM. So is that right do you think?
OWEN:	Nine, ten, eleven, twelve, one, two, three, four, five, nine hours and thirty is left.
INT:	Right, you have another go. Say if you go from nine to ten, that's one hour isn't it? Then you eleven will be two, twelve will be three, one thirty, two thirty, three thirty, four thirty, and a half, so is that seven and a half hours. You check.
OWEN:	Ten hours thirty minutes, eleven hours and thirty minutes. Or twelve hours and thirty minutes, one hour and thirty minutes, two hours and thirty minutes, four hours and thirty minutes, five hours and ...
INT:	No you missed out on three, three thirty...
OWEN:	Three thirty, four thirty,...
INT:	And you need another half hour.
OWEN:	Three thirty.
INT:	You're up to four and you've got to get to five o'clock haven't you? So that's seven and a half. Is that right?

He had a similar dilemma when dealing with the maths concepts in another example. He was required to find the answer to the following question:

How many hours would it take the train to cover 750 kms?

He did not understand the logic of the problem nor the mechanics of division. Owen read the question aloud before attempting to solve the problem. His

discussion with me showed some of his confusion with the task. His first attempt of "go by the highest number" appeared to be a wild guess. When I clarified the problem for him he was able to tell me how far the train would travel in one hour, he then worked out that the train would travel 600 km in 2 hours but made another wild guess of 12. After some discussion he told me that he must divide 750 by 600 to find out how long the train would take, when he needed to subtract it, which is what he then did. At that point he had arrived at the correct calculation but did not understand that the answer was the amount of time taken to travel 750 km. The following extract of this conversation demonstrates these issues:

OWEN:	How many hours would it take the train to travel seven hundred, seven hundred and fifty kilometres. Check on how far it goes in one hour.' Two hours, three hours, four hours (*pause 30 secs*).
INT:	Now, how are you going to work this one out?
OWEN:	Go by the highest number?
INT:	Read that again and see what it says?
OWEN:	'Think of how far it goes in one hour.'
INT:	Right, how far does it go in one hour? It says up here.
OWEN:	Three hundred kilometres.
INT:	Right
OWEN:	In two, in three hours, in two hours it goes in six (inaudible)...
INT:	So...
OWEN:	Twelve.
INT:	And you're only going, in two hours it goes six hundred kilometres, and you want to know how long it takes to go seven hundred and fifty kilometres. You've worked out it takes two hours to go six hundred kilometres so how long do you think it will take you to go seven hundred and fifty? Have you got a way of working that out?
OWEN:	You divide...
INT:	Well, you divide what by, what are you going to divide?
OWEN:	Seven hundred and fifty you divide that by six hundred.
INT:	Have a go and see what that works out to be.
OWEN:	Two point five.
INT:	So what's two point five? What are you trying to find out?
OWEN:	Trying to find out how far you can go in seven hundred fifty kilometres.

INT: So you're trying to find out how long it would take you, so it's 2.5 what?

OWEN: Two and a half hours.

When I asked him how he had solved the problem, Owen seemed either unclear about the mechanics of the calculation or did not have the vocabulary to express his mathematical understandings:

INT: Mmm. So how did you know how to do that?

OWEN: Well you look at this number and then you multiply it by that number.

INT: Did you multiply or divide?

OWEN: I divided.

INT: Yes, that's right. But how did you know how to do that? What made you think to do that?

OWEN: Just came into your mind.

I was impressed by Owen's perseverance and willingness to continue with his work despite the obstacles he continually encountered. His perception that he is a good maths student somehow sustains him and enables him to persist with difficult tasks. His determination to get his work done, along with his willingness to take risks and "have a go", appear to have constructed useful literacy practices which serve him well when he has someone willing to support him. However, the "search and guess" strategy he has adopted does not provide him with a systematic approach to his learning.

In another part of the text Owen had difficulty understanding the implicit logic of the following question:

> Another TVG route is Paris to Lausanne, Switzerland. Why do you think this would be a main line? (What do holiday makers do in Switzerland?)

In this section, he was required to infer understandings and use some assumed cultural knowledge about why the "very fast train" would be used only for heavy usage routes. The task was rather vague and quite difficult for people who already have a well established knowledge of the geography of Europe. For a child who did not have any prior information about Switzerland, the task was very confusing. The text in this case added to the problems Owen was having in dealing with the literacy demands of the maths activities. Since Owen's reading practices were still focussed on the pragmatic roles of code breaking and general meaning making, he had some difficulty in making the inferences needed to complete the activity effectively. In addition, he needed to know that Switzerland is an alpine country which attracts tourists for skiing in the winter and boating in the summer. None of this information was provided in the brochure. It was assumed to be "in-head" knowledge for most high school students. The map provided with the activity did not contain an index, so there was no way that children who did not know the location of different

European countries could find them, other than by searching the text. At one point in the discussion I suggested that Owen might get an atlas in order to have access to an index. When he did this, he was able to demonstrate effective map reading skills. In the following discussion Owen's confusion is apparent when he makes the wild guess of " Because it's longer" to explain why a Very Fast Train is provided to Switzerland:

INT:	Have a look at the map and see what you think? Can you find Switzerland?
OWEN:	Yes
INT:	Right. What's the question? It says...
OWEN:	'Holiday makers use...
INT:	But is also says why do you think this would be a main line?
OWEN:	Because it's longer.
INT:	Maybe. Yeah. But would they have, what's the part here? Do you think they'd put Very Fast Trains on lines that were places that nobody went to very much. They'd be expensive wouldn't they?
OWEN:	Yeah.

Watching Owen engage with the reading needed to complete his maths, I wonder how Owen's learning practices have been constructed. What appears to count is: pleasing Des by getting his work completed successfully, taking risks and attempting things by trial and error in the hope that someone will help him if he is on the wrong track, and using his intuition and visual memory to provide him with clues about how to do his work.

Social Studies

The reading practices used by Owen when doing maths were also evident when he was engaged in social studies. He enjoys social studies if it is interesting, and when it is easy. He was very interested in the units of work he did about ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome. Earlier in the year he had written a tour guide for the National Parks in Western Australia. He had enjoyed this assignment immensely and his teachers kept a copy to show the other students who were doing the unit. When reading in social studies Owen adopted the same practices noted previously. If he didn't know a word, he left it out or sounded it out and then picked up the meaning by reading on. When he came across those words again, he appeared to recognise them immediately. Owen often mispronounced unknown words the first time he read them but intuitively got them right when he encountered them again.

On the day I visited Owen he was working on a unit of work about the agrarian revolution called "A Revolution In Farming". Despite his interest in working on his Uncle's farm, he was unable to relate modern farming to the information in this unit. Thus he found the work tedious and difficult. He read

about the layout of a manor and was then required to mark the different features of a manor on a map provided in the text. He skimmed through the text and quickly moved on to do the activity. Because he had not engaged fully with the text he did not have enough information to complete the task and found it arduous. Although he re-read the text many times he had some difficulty following the directions and once more I was called on for help. In the next example, after reading the instructions aloud Owen sought assistance because he couldn't work out how to fill in the diagram. He was unable to work out where the peasants lived or where the fallow field was shown. This was probably due to his confusion about the meaning of fallow. In the following transcript the miscues made by Owen as he read the text have been marked:

OWEN: 'In the last lesson you learnt about the system of feudalism in Europe. In the Middle Ages you came to understand how a Baron would grant a stake of land to take a knight. In return for this the knight had to fight in wars for the Baron. The proper name for this state of land was the Manor, Manors. The knight became known as the Lord of the Manor. Usually the Manor considered (*miscue for* ***consisted***) of the following, a village where the serfs and peasants lived, farm land, common land, land on which anyone could graze their animal (*s omitted*), a fine manor house for the lord, a church and priests (***house*** *omitted*), a village well, a large mill for grinding village wheat and a village stream. Can you find these topical (*miscue for* ***typical***) features of (***a*** *omitted*) Manor in the diagram? Most of (*miscue for* ***match***) the features (inaudible, ***below*** *omitted*) with their use (inaudible, ***positions*** *omitted*) on the map of the feudal manor of the Middle Age (s *omitted*). Write in the correct letter of, on the map. One has been done for you. (*pause 40 secs*)

INT: Where are the peasants do you think?

OWEN: Here (inaudible).

INT: No, don't these look like huts there, don't they? (*pause 20 secs*) What's the next one? Keep going.

OWEN: Three big fields.

INT: Mmm. Was there one that wasn't cultivated? Did they clear that? That's right. One of them they'd always leave, not grow any crops on it, give it a rest because if you planted too much on it the soil gets worn out.

The three field system was explained in the next section of the text. He had difficulty with the words "fallow" and "ploughed". He did not link their

meaning to the explanation given in the sentence, "The soil was allowed to rest". However, he struggled on with the activities not fully understanding the logic of the text. In the next section the text read as follows:

> The number of strips that a farmer had depended on his position in society or how wealthy he was. For example, in the diagram above, Roger has more strips of land than Troll. We can assume that Roger is wealthier than Troll. Notice also that a number of strips are next to the river. Farmers felt that it was important to own strips near the river.

He was asked to consult a very complex map which showed the position of the three fields and the strips of land held by two of the farmers. The students were expected to deduce from the number and location of the strips held by one of the farmers that he was wealthier and more important than the other farmer. Owen found it difficult to make sense of the map and to understand the concepts behind the lesson. Nevertheless, with some assistance he persisted with the activity and completed the whole of the lesson. The students were then asked to answer this question:

> Why would you say that it was important to have land near the river?

Notice how the text was ambiguous, it did not tell the students that Roger had a number of strips next to the river, although this was shown in the diagram. So Owen did not connect the ownership of river strips with being wealthy. He was unable to relate the need to attain good land next to the river with the likelihood of getting better crops, which would in turn provide more wealth for those people who owned the riverside strips of land.

His dogged perseverance with his work and willingness to keep trying allowed him to work on without full understanding. As he did this, his alertness and effective memory allowed him to gain considerable information about his work. His inability to infer implicit knowledge from the text presented an obstacle to his systematic understanding of the topic. Perhaps, when he is really interested in a topic, his interest may allow him to access intuitively some of this implicit knowledge.

English

Owen is not confident about English as it requires a lot of reading and writing which he finds difficult and very time consuming. Not withstanding this perception of English, he appears to become quite interested in some of the novels he has to read if he can relate to the issues in them. For example, he apparently enjoyed reading the novel *Cannily Cannily* by Simon French, because the theme of the book related to how a school boy copes with being different. He had previously written a letter to Simon French in which he discussed the issue of playground fighting and how it might be resolved. Owen was currently revising an activity in which he had been asked to write a conversation between two of the characters in *Cannily Cannily*. He had chosen

to write a dialogue between some of the parents in the school as they discussed Trevor, the main character. In the discussion recorded in the following transcript, Owen told me what he had been doing and read some of his written conversation to me:

OWEN:	Have you heard of a book named *Cannily Cannily*?
INT:	Oh right, yes, I know that book. Did you enjoy it?
OWEN:	Yeah. I'm just writing in the last task of the unit of English. I had to read the book and now I'm doing it because they're at a barbecue and they're talking about...
INT:	Who's at the barbecue?
OWEN:	Mr Fuller and Mrs Bates and they're talking about the Jarrad family.
INT:	All right then and what did you have to write? You had to write the conversation they were having? Is that what..?
OWEN:	Yeah.
INT:	Do you have to imagine that they are at this barbecue and they are talking about this other family?
OWEN:	Yes, and Trevor.
INT:	And Trevor, right. And do you want to read me what you've written?
OWEN:	'Mrs Bates said, "hello Mr Fuller, how are you?" Mr Fuller says, "Good," and, "How are you?" "Isn't it lovely tonight?" (inaudible) Good days are gone.' Then it's back to Mrs Grace. "Yes it is, a bit was hard with Martin because he says that he loves my best friend".

His usual practices of "search and guess" do not work for him in English where he has to devise original writing and ensure the mechanics of his writing are correct. He obviously feels frustrated by the accuracy required in writing. He is unused to using capital letters and has not yet mastered direct speech. However he had written a draft of his work which Elaine had then helped him revise. While I was there, he reluctantly edited this writing to ensure that the direct speech and capital letters were accurate. It took him 40 minutes to correct one and a half pages of writing. Des had to stand by to coax him as he went along. The following extract shows Des and Owen working along together. Notice once again the resistance shown by Owen and the playful banter Des maintains in order to get the task completed:

DES:	It's task whatever, what was it, G?
OWEN:	I don't know.

DES:	E, F, G must be G. You'd better change those capital letters.
OWEN:	No.
DES:	Yes.
OWEN:	No.
DES:	(*pause 2 min 30 secs*) Just leave them stuck on. (*pause 10 secs*)
OWEN:	No.
DES:	Yes, capital letters for a name.
OWEN:	No you don't.
DES:	Yes you do.
OWEN:	That's not starting sentence.
DES:	Doesn't matter. Capital letter for a name, person, what else is a capital letter for? Do you have capital letters for when you use your name?
OWEN:	(inaudible)
DES:	Your teacher will come through with the red biro.
OWEN:	No.
DES:	See when he does a good copy and it's not good enough [his teacher] comes through with her red biro.

Des and Elaine feel he has made significant progress with the mechanics of writing and are systematically working through the different skills he has not yet grasped.

Owen finds composing quite agreeable so his problem does not appear to be related to the demands of composition. He showed me a completed unit of work in which he composed a number of poems. Because poems are short and can be revised and edited quickly he found this activity "fun" and to his liking. He expressed an interest in the drama and media aspects of doing English and told me about a very successful video he had made in which Des had provided him with police sirens as part of the sound effects. If the hard work of Elaine and Des pays off, and Owen can more effectively automate his reading and writing, he appears to have the capacity to understand and enjoy English.

Science

I was not able to observe Owen completing any science activities, but he told me that he found science really interesting because it is easy and "you can do things". He explained this as follows:

OWEN:	Science.
INT:	Yeah, you like science?
OWEN:	Yeah.

INT:	Which units, have you done any science that you like?
OWEN:	Every single one.
INT:	You like them all. Okay, so with the subjects that you like doing, what is it about them that you like. Is it the way the materials are set out or is it the actual information in them?
OWEN:	No. Experiments.
INT:	You like experiments. What do you mean by that, is it because they get you to do things?
OWEN:	Yeah.

Conclusion

Owen has obviously made very good progress since he has been working by distance education. Des, the local police officer and Elaine, the co-ordinator of the distance education centre have established a rapport with Owen which appears to provide the motivation needed to keep him on task and to complete his work. He steadfastly continues with his work even when his literacy skills make it difficult for him to fully understand what he is doing. His willingness to "have a go" allows him to "learn by doing". Owen's major objective is to get his work completed to the satisfaction of Des. His practice of "search" and "intuitive guessing" often enables him to achieve this. However, such practices do not seem to be so effective when he is required to use inference or logic in other subject areas. Through the support of his mentors, Owen has been constructed as an effective learner. This knowledge provides him with the determination to continue with his work even when it is confusing. His construction of learning, as a process of application to the task, allows him the opportunity to resolve many of the problems he confronts.

CHAPTER 8
CASE STUDY 2: EMILY BAKER

William Louden

Wooloongama, a well established sheep and cattle station of about 90,000 hectares, is the home of the Baker family. The Baker's live in one of several homesteads that have been built on the property during the hundred years the land has been used for pastoral purposes. The present homestead has been renovated in recent years and is set in an established garden which includes attractive pergolas, guest accommodation and a swimming pool.

We arrived at the property late in the day, after a long drive from a station further inland. Warmly welcomed, we were invited to join the group of people who were sitting on the front verandah for a pre-dinner drink. The group included Mr and Mrs Baker, a relative of Mrs Baker's who had flown in by light aircraft, a pair of Aboriginal stockmen, an Israeli back-packer who was briefly working for the Bakers, and a kangaroo shooter and his wife who had been working on the property. This larger than usual group was gathered at Wooloongama because mustering was planned for the next few days.

Mr and Mrs Baker were both educated at private schools, Mrs Baker until Year 11 and Mr Baker until Year 12. They both come from English-speaking backgrounds. Mr Baker grew up in the city. Mrs Baker grew up on a pastoral station and was educated at boarding schools from the age of six, in the days before the school of the air service was established. There are three girls in the Baker family, Sarah (Year 2), Natalie (Year 4) and Emily (Year 6). The Bakers expect their children to continue with school at least until Year 12. If the girls would like to go on further, Mrs Baker would like them to "go to uni, or if they don't go to uni they can go to tech". During their primary school years, the Baker girls have been educated through the school of the air, with the assistance of a series of governesses. The present governess, Tracey, completed a BA in primary teaching last year. In a period of high unemployment for teaching graduates, she has chosen to gain some teaching experience as a governess. In the meantime, she is upgrading her qualifications through a fourth year Bachelor of Education by part-time external study.

When they reach secondary school age, Mrs Baker expects to send her daughters away to boarding school. She talked with some sadness about the prospect. "Once they leave home, that's it," she said.

> Once Emily goes off to boarding school, that'll be it. She'll want to come home on holidays and then all of sudden she's finished school and the big wide world. She's a lady, you know. So, from the time they leave, they're children no longer. They lose all their

> innocence and everything else and get corrupted and all those horrible things. It's all part of growing up, I suppose.

In the meantime, the family enjoys an active outdoor life with everyone involved in work on the property. As Mrs Baker said:

> If there's a race meeting on, we all go to the races together for the day. We've all been across (to a gymkhana) as a family and camped for three days. We take horses over so the kids can play. At lamb-marking time they're involved, shearing time they're involved, they've got to be. They get on the back of the motorbike or horse and drove sheep and they drive. They can come and do mill runs, clean troughs, yeah, but then when they're together they just entertain themselves with softball. We're lucky they're very close, they very seldom have an argument.

Family Literacy Practices

Mrs Baker identified her husband as "the reader" in the family. He reads "whatever's on the table," according to Mrs Baker. This includes adventure novels such as those written by Wilbur Smith and publications he receives through the mail. Although the Bakers have access to a library in the nearby town, they usually buy the books they read. Tracey, the governess, identified herself as a reader, too. At present, most of her reading was associated with her external study. Tracey's study also means that she does more writing than the other adult members of the household. Tracey also keeps a personal diary and has written "lots of letters", especially in her first few months on the property.

Mr Baker does most of the office work associated with the property. He keeps a station diary which contains "the basics" such as "Rained today, stayed home, pulled the windmill, that sort of thing". Mrs Baker writes a few business letters associated with her horse riding activities, but noted that "the telephone has made it easy".

Tracey and Mrs Baker have many literacy-related interactions with the girls. In the few days before the data were collected for this study, Tracey had asked Natalie to look in the book *Ronno the Clown* to find out more about circuses and trapezes, Mrs Baker had told Emily about a newspaper article concerning violence in a city suburb, Tracey had used an atlas in a discussion with Emily about Spain, Mrs Baker and Sarah had read aloud together, and there had been many discussions about television programs. While we were conducting interviews for the study, one or other of the girls often came into the kitchen to update us on favourite shows. According to Mrs Baker, this was very common:

> MRS BAKER: Tracey and I will go in there and say 'What's happened?' and they'll tell you the whole story.
>
> TRACEY: (*laughter*) Yep.

INT: Is that particular programmes, or they keep you informed about what they're watching?

MRS BAKER: They keep us informed about whatever. If we're out doing dishes or ...

TRACEY: 'Mum, guess what just happened?' (*laughter*)

MRS BAKER: No they love it. And if there's an advertisement on some movie they'll say 'Oh god, we'll have to watch that, can we watch that?', and I'll go 'Oh yeah, probably'. There are some shows at 8.30 that I don't mind them watching, if they're light, funny ones, not murder and all that sort of thing but light funny ones.

The AFL football broadcasts are the most popular television programs on Wooloongama. As Mrs Baker said, "We love our football up here". Everyone is interested in the football. According to Mrs Baker the children "get in there and yell and scream", and so does Tracey, who says she's "gotta watch the footy". The children have other favourite programs including soaps such as *Home and Away*. If there is a "good movie" on, Tracey and Mrs Baker will sit down to watch television together when "everyone else has gone to bed".

The radio is also an important medium on Wooloongama Station. As Mrs Baker explained, the rural news on the *Country Hour* was particularly important:

> We always listen to *Country Hour* and they're always told to shut up, it's very important, and they always ask 'Why is it important?' 'Because,' I say, 'we're always trying to find out what the sheep markets are doing or what the wool prices are doing' and they'll say 'Why is it so important?' Because I say, 'Well if the wool prices don't keep going up we won't be here'.

The Baker family have a Macintosh computer on loan from the school of the air. Mrs Baker would "love to be able to use the computer" but she's "never been taught". Tracey, the governess, uses the computer to prepare her university assignments. The children use the computer for their school work, and to play educational games. According to Emily, using the computer for school work is "alright". The main advantage, she said, is that "it's easy when you're writing stories (because) you don't have to wear your hand out". Although the Baker girls have the option of sending their language work in to school by modem, they continue to do most of their work on paper. Emily explained that this is the case because "the motor doesn't go on in the morning and we usually finish (school) in the morning".

Emily's Reading, Writing and Viewing

In her spare time, Emily and her sisters ride their horses, play ball games such as tennis and softball, and watch television. Emily does not often read in her spare time, but noted that Tracey had developed a new system to encourage

the girls to read more books. The way the system worked is that each time they finished a book, the book was recorded on the chart and the child received the reward of a lolly. Emily had finished one book so far, a book "about other countries, about what time of day it is in like Kenya and Africa and all that, and (in) Europe". Emily said that she liked "all kinds of books":

> I like all kinds of books really. I like story books. Story books must be my favourite and then I love cartoon books, magazines and that, and I read books on countries and things.

There are many books in the school room, in Emily's bedroom, and in her father's study. Most of Emily's books have been bought for her as gifts, by her grandparents or her mother. Last Christmas, for example, her mother had brought back from Perth "a big Zorro book". Other books are sent out to the property by the school of the air "but we have to send them back". They do not use the school or public libraries in town, except when school visits are arranged during camp weeks.

Emily seemed very pleased when she was given a copy of *The Most Beautiful Horse in the World*, a gift to acknowledge her involvement in the research project. "I'd love to read this," she said. She expected it would be a good book because "there's going to be horses in it", and she made the following prediction about the book:

> I think it will be about this girl, maybe, and her horse and she might go to a gymkhana or a show or something, and she has been picked for having the most beautiful horse or something, something like that.

Emily is less fond of writing than reading. "I don't really like writing stories," she said. "I like thinking about them but I don't exactly like writing them". She has a pen pal, in England. Emily last wrote to her about a month ago, "but she hasn't written back. She's really busy and I'm really busy and I send her photos of me and (she sends) photos of herself".

Emily rated herself as "about average" as a learner, "about average" at reading, "pretty good" at writing, "pretty good at speaking but not listening," and "good at brain busters in maths". According to Emily, the subject she is best at is language and the subject she needs most help with is mathematics. She thinks that she needs to be good at working on her own, "because Sarah needs most of the help, and Tracey is busy with Sarah and Natalie". In fact, she had recently moved out of the main school room into the room next door so that she could get on with her work without interruption. "It's a bit noisy in there at times," she said, "because Sarah's got a lot of activities she has to get through and a lot of it's like music and drama, things like that".

When asked what she would have to do to be "good at reading" Emily emphasised concentration. "I think you have to concentrate really hard if you want to be really good at reading," she said. "I think you have to concentrate on the words". Asked about reading and writing different kinds of texts,

Emily did not think there were any differences in the strategies she used for reading or writing stories or information texts. The important thing about being "good at writing," she said, was "expression". As she explained:

EMILY: I'd put, I'd try to put in expression.

INT: Uhuh. What does that mean?

EMILY: Like um, put in your thoughts and oh, I can't explain it, um.

INT: Like good words?

EMILY: Yeah, good words, yeah, strong words.

INT: Strong words, okay. And would that be the same if you were trying to write an information text? If you had to write an assignment on Spain, what would you try and put in the writing to make sure you did a good job of it?

EMILY: I'd ask for people's comments and what they think. I'd trust their comment. If they think something's wrong, then I'd go back and fix it. I mean there's no point in trying to write a story if you don't want to write it.

Emily usually watches television "in the afternoons". Later on in the evening, she usually watches soaps such as *Neighbours*, and lifestyle programs such as *Our House* and *Looking Good*. On the weekend, when she is allowed to stay up later, she often watches television movies. The family sometimes rents videos from the town video library. At the time the data were being collected, the video release of the Disney animated movie *Aladdin* was being advertised on television. Emily said that they had been "begging Mum to get us *Aladdin*".

When she was asked her opinions about the influence of television, Emily suggested that she was not much influenced by advertisements which tried to persuade her to buy things. "We don't get many of those ads up here," she said. She was more inclined to agree that there were messages in programs such as *Home and Away*:

> Um, it's mainly about teenagers and about how their lives are at boarding school, high school, ah what else? Some of them about drinking problems or about bashing their kids up, things like that and drugs may be and, sort of, like that on *90210*, *Heartbreak High*, all those programmes.

Doing Distance Education

The school at Wooloongama is located in two rooms of the old homestead. Natalie (year 5) and Sarah (year 2) work in the main school room, formerly a kitchen, which is organised and decorated very much like a conventional primary school classroom. There is a writing corner which has a desk, some junior primary size chairs, and a range of pens and pencils neatly stored in

trays and brightly coloured cylinders. On the wall directly above the writing corner is a set of handwriting posters, which demonstrate the correct letter formation for the Victorian Modern Cursive handwriting style. On the wall above the handwriting posters are hand-coloured posters identifying letters of the alphabet, displays of student work and merit certificates awarded by the teachers of the school of the air. Elsewhere in the main room there are cupboards marked "Tracey's cupboard", "art", "science", "games" and "Sarah". Above Sarah's cupboard is a chart titled "words Sarah can read". On the chart are pasted flash cards of words such as "of", "the", "and" and "a".

Above the old kitchen hearth, on the mantle-piece, is a two metre long collection of books. The books include old paperbacks of adult fiction, such as books by Georgette Heyer, and many children's illustrated books about birds, dogs and horses. There is a blackboard on one wall. One half of the blackboard has an attractive chalk drawing and a set of reminders about events, such as "Sarah's music 10.30". The other half of the blackboard shows signs of recent use for active teaching, including the day's date and the spelling of the homonyms "hear" and "here". The remaining walls of the high ceilinged old kitchen are surfaced with a pin-up board material, and covered with pieces of student work and charts made by Tracey, the governess. The charts include "months of the year", "days of the week" and "school rules". Furniture in the room includes a teacher's desk and two children's school desks placed in the middle of the room.

The room next door to the main school room contains Emily's desk, some book cases and the long table of school of the air equipment, including the radio transceiver, a Macintosh laptop computer and an ink jet printer. There is a globe of the world on one of the book cases, and a series of school reference books including an atlas, a *World Almanac* and a dictionary. In the other book case there are more than 100 children's books, supplied on loan to the family by the Charles Hadley Travelling Library scheme.

The daily routine of school is determined by the schedule of air lessons. The day begins when the first air lesson starts, and they take a smoko from 9.30 AM to 10.00 AM, when none of the children have an air lesson. After smoko they work until noon. "Most days we get finished by twelve," Tracey said. If there is an afternoon air lesson, they go back in the afternoon. The children do their mathematics and language around the air lesson time-table. As Tracey explained, "it's better for them, I think, if they can decide what they want to do and in which order":

> Natalie starts her (air lesson) and then she just goes into maths, I think she starts with, and the same with Emily, she likes to get maths out the way, but it's really up to them the order in which they do it.

Although the girls have some choice about the order in which they work on mathematics and language, they have to follow a plan which Tracey draws up for each set of work. She adopted this practice because she found the children were missing out too many of the activities in each set. In her words:

> In the first few weeks that I was here, I didn't know very much about it all, and we'd get to the end of the set and I'd pick up all these activities that they hadn't done. They didn't think they had to, or they hadn't read it properly or whatever. So they, usually, they will read it. The problem is with most of these, they don't read the instructions and (later realise) 'Oh we have to do this, I better read this'.

Mrs Baker is very pleased with the progress her children are making with Tracey as their governess. She can see "a big improvement" in the girls' attitude. They go off to school each morning "happy as Larry," she said, and they "love their school". This was echoed by Emily who said that "this year I've improved a lot". Tracey attributed part of the improvement to her teaching of learning skills and strategies, and part of it to her close supervision, as this discussion between Tracey and Emily shows:

TRACEY:	You'd just been left to muddle through it without being taught the strategies and the skills that you need to actually ...
EMILY:	The last three years I think I've done much better. I've improved on all of my work and this year I think I've improved a lot.
TRACEY:	Yes, I think you have too. (*Laughing*).
EMILY:	I don't need my governess as much.
TRACEY:	What was that?
EMILY:	I don't need my governess so much.
TRACEY:	No you are actually working a lot more independently. Although, do you think you need, do you think you would work as well if I wasn't there to actually make sure that you ...
EMILY:	I don't think anybody would work as well if they didn't have somebody there just to help them through it.

Emily's first reaction to receiving marked work back from her teacher was to "look for the stickers," she said. Also, she would "look for good comments" and Tracey would usually "read us out the little sheet of paper that they write about how we're going". From Emily's point of view, the feedback she gets from Tracey is more valuable than the feedback she gets through the mail:

> I think I feel pretty good when I get my work back from my teacher, Mrs. Connelly but I think I take more notice of Tracey's feedback because she is actually there when I do it and by the time I get my set back I am usually interested in something else and I've forgotten what the set was really about.

According to Tracey, the value of the school of the air teachers' feedback is reduced by the delay in receiving the feedback. Her feedback "on the spot" is much more useful:

> They get the feedback from me more or less on the spot. It takes a couple of weeks before they get it back from their teachers. I read through it when it comes back, but most of the time they're not interested. They're in the middle of something completely different and (they say) 'What's come back? Oh we'll see how many stickers we got'.

Mrs Baker and Tracey both expressed concerns about whether feedback from the teachers told them enough about the children's standards of work. When a set comes back from the school, Tracey said, it has comments which say "This is what's Emily's done. This is what's been good. This is what needs improvement", but the teachers do not reveal how the child is performing in comparison with the other children. If she asks a direct question about performance, she said, she receives an "airy fairy sort of answer" such as "Oh well, she's doing quite well". Mrs Baker had the same kind of experience last year, when Sarah was in Year 1 and did not quickly learn to read. When she expressed her concerns to teachers making a home visit, she was told, "I wouldn't worry about it, some kids are slower on the uptake than others, I wouldn't worry about it at all. All of a sudden it'll just click".

Mrs Baker is able to delegate all of the work associated with the children's schooling to Tracey, the governess. Tracey listens to the Parents and Citizen's Association meetings held on the radio network, but she said that she doesn't "usually have anything to say". They do not have many reasons to contact the school directly. Occasionally, Tracey said, she would telephone the school if the radio reception of an air lesson had been too poor to follow. In such cases , she would ring up and ask, "What was that about today?" On another occasion she had telephoned the school before a home visit to ask the teacher to bring out some books for Emily, but usually she lets the children make the telephone calls. "They have no worries about talking on the phone," she said. The most common reasons for calling the school were to do with materials: books to be sent out to the property, computer paper required, or learning materials with missing pages. Emily confirmed this, when she said she would use the telephone "if we've got a problem with the computer or the radio, things like that, or if we're not quite sure what to do or if we haven't got any books".

Emily's Language Lessons

The Year 6 language materials provided by the school for Set 11 were theme based materials entitled *Grans and Gramps*. For each day of the set, a literature stimulus is provided on some aspect of the theme of grandparents. Day 1, for example, has a six page story called "Heritage", about a city boy who visits his grandfather's farm. Following the literature stimulus is a section called "Think About - Talk About" which provides four or five questions for discussion with the child's home tutor. For example, the questions for Day 1 include:

> 1. What might have been the reasons for Alexander being almost a stranger to his grandfather?
> and
> 5. Most people love their grandparents and love to visit them. Tell your supervisor the things that you most like about each of your grandparents, or some old people you know.

These comprehension and discussion questions are followed by a series of exercises, which range from looking at a set of adjectives that might describe grandparents (Day 6, p. 49) to making jam tarts, an activity justified because "Grandmas often make special treats for their grandchildren" (Day 9, p. 70). Some of the activities in the set are marked with a letter-box logo, indicating that these activities are to be sent to the teacher for marking.

Reading and Writing

The section of text that follows describes Emily's activities as she worked her way through Day 9 of the theme work on grandparents. As soon as she reached the end of her mathematics for the day, Emily began to reorganise herself for language. As always, she began by consulting the chart of activities which Tracey constructs for each set. Next, she read aloud to herself from the set, and tried to work out what the instructions meant she had to do. (The text she read aloud is marked by quotation marks.)

> "Exercise 4. Write your own thoughts about your grandparents. You may choose to write about one grandparent only if you wish. Illustrate your work too". Okay, Exercise 4, now, tell us about my grandparents, so, write reports about your grandparents.

She worked in silence for 2 minutes 30 seconds before turning to the researcher to ask, "How do you spell sense of humour? Is it with an 's'?" After a further 15 seconds she asked another question. ("Sense of humour's one word isn't it?") After being told that there is an "of" in the middle of "sense of humour" she worked in silence for another minute. At this point she announced that she was finished and volunteered to read her work aloud:

> I've finished that activity now and so, so I'll read you out what I've just written. "My grandparents are kind and helpful. They both have a sense of humour". Oh sense of humour, full stop. "Ma tea.., Ma teaches us to cook and Pa teaches us about cattle".

Drama

Exercise 4 completed, Tracey turned her attention to the drama activity which was next on Tracey's list for the day. Emily moved into the other school room, where Tracey was working with Sarah and Natalie. Tracey decided to involve all of the children in Emily's drama activity. In the space around the desk in the school room, the girls followed the movements suggested by the text Tracey read from the language set. The lesson proceeded as follows, with

Tracey reading the text and interspersing some directions of her own. (The text she read aloud is marked by quotation marks.)

TRACEY: Okay. "You're an old person and it's time for your afternoon rest. Use your walking stick to help you wobble slowly over to your rocking chair. Careful you don't trip over the sleeping cat!" Okay. you're at the chair. "Lower yourself into your rocking chair". Go all the way down. Okay now " ... hook your walking stick on the arm, on the chair's arm, put your feet up..."

EMILY: It's a long way down

TRACEY: "...and relax. Rock yourself gently in your chair," backwards and forwards. "What a beautiful day, the sun is warm on your body and you slowly drift off".

EMILY: (*Laughs*)

TRACEY: "The rocking movement takes you back to your babyhood days of being rocked to sleep in your mother's arms, the same gentle movement of the rocking chair, slowly rock back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Drowsily you remember. You're about a year old and you are just beginning to crawl. Get on the floor and then move onto your hands and knees and begin crawling around. Explore some of the areas of the house that you hadn't seen before. It's great fun moving around by yourself but after a while your knees begin to get sore. Sit down and have a rest. At about fifteen months you decide to try walking. Crawl over to a chair". Crawl over.

EMILY: (*to her sister*) Crawl over to this chair.

TRACEY: "Now pull yourself up and try to balance on your feet".

EMILY: Oo oo oo oh aaah ahh.

TRACEY: Bump, "you fall down".

EMILY: Rrrrrruuuu

TRACEY: "Try again".

EMILY: Waaaah

TRACEY: Whoops you've fallen over again.

EMILY: Oooooh (*crash, laughs)*

TRACEY: Okay, keep on trying. "At last you manage to stand but you still need to hold on tightly to the chair".

As the drama lesson continued, Tracey followed the outline of the text, taking the children through learning to walk and learning to ride a bicycle. Finally, she had the children fall from their bikes, wake up, and realise that they had been "dreaming".

TRACEY: Okay wake up with a start, you've been remembering. You "... find yourself on the floor beside your rocking chair. You must have become quite excited when you dreamt about your childhood days, and you've fallen from your chair. Slowly pick yourself up ..." and put yourself in the chair. Hmmm, "... they certainly were good old days. Relax and gently rock yourself to sleep again. As you doze in the sun, think about the suggestion made to you about moving into an old peoples' home".

At this point, Emily interrupted Tracey's reading to respond directly. "Oh I'd hate it if I had to go into a nursing home," she said. "I've been there before and it was really horrible". Tracey continued reading the discussion questions which asked, "What are your feelings about moving?":

TRACEY: So it's been suggested that you need to move into a nursing home because it's too hard to look after a big old house on your own and the garden and everything, so what are your feelings about moving?

EMILY: Mmmm.

TRACEY: You just told me why don't you want to move.

EMILY: Because, I like living by myself and I don't have to have anything done for me, and go out when I want.

TRACEY: Do you think it would to be good to have other people around?

EMILY: (inaudible)...you could see your grandchildren whenever you want.

TRACEY: Don't you think you could do that anyway?

EMILY: Yeah, but I don't like (inaudible) ...

TRACEY: You've got your own room, your own bathroom, but you wouldn't have to worry about cleaning such a big house.

EMILY: No, I'll live in a small flat or something.

At the end of the morning, Tracey came back into Emily's room and asked her what she found out in language today. Emily's response was brief:

EMILY: About my grandparents. I didn't find anything. It was nothing really, just one thing about my grandparents.

TRACEY: Yeah, what did you write about them?

EMILY: I wrote about what I think about my grandparents. I think they're fine.

As the girls met together at the door, ready for the walk over to the house for lunch, Tracey spoke to each child separately about their work:

> Natalie, I was very pleased with the finished version of your interview. Sarah, I was very happy with your maths and you got all your spelling right today and Emily you did a top job with your maths today so I've heard. Off you go.

Emily's approach to Distance Education

Emily is a very experienced distance education learner, with well-established strategies for getting through a set. Her first step each day, before she starts to work on language (or mathematics), is to consult the chart of activities made for her by Tracey. As Emily explained:

> Tracey makes up this chart for me every set and it goes all the way to Day Ten. You just go through it and find out what the activities (are). You've read the story and you do the drama and you read through it, but it just doesn't take as long because you know what you have to do.

Emily's calculations about exactly what "you have to do" are shaped by a sense of what is really essential and what is optional in the distance education texts provided for her. For example, she regards the written outcomes which will be marked as much more important than the stimulus materials provided for her to read. Her strategy is to look at the plan and focus on those activities which are listed on the plan. As she said, "If I don't find a set interesting, I usually just don't read the stories". As she works through the distance education materials, she also uses the typography as a guide to what she should do. In the case of her current language materials, she regarded the text in bold type face as compulsory. "All these things in dark writing you have to do", she explained, "and these other parts of the page you can read if you want to learn more things about it". Similarly, notwithstanding the drama lesson described above, she has learned that drama is not essential. "You don't really have to do drama", she said, "but it is fun". Sometimes, she miscalculates the amount of work she has to do. In these cases, Tracey's marking is her guide:

> Um, I don't really know when I've done enough because, well, Tracey, goes around and anything that I haven't done or, I, she wants me to redo again, I do that the next day, because she doesn't mark during the day, she marks after.

Using these three strategies—focus on the plan, read the text in bold, re-do any work identified by the governess—Emily works through her language activities in a well organised and efficient manner. "I like to get everything over and done with," she said. She works towards the goal of completing the set. As she said, "I really feel good when the set is over because I have done a good job and because it is finished at last".

Her way of reading the distance education text, however, seems to truncate the work provided for her. For example, when she read the instructions for Exercise 4, above, she read only the part of the instruction that referred to what had to be sent in to the teacher. This section was printed in bold and marked with a letter box indicating that the work would be marked by the teacher. She did not read the stimulus material above the instruction, which was not in bold, and which directed her to read a one and a half page spread of illustrations and text. The instructions read:

> Opposite is a collection of pictures and comments by young children about their grandparents. Look at the pictures and read the comments. What overall impression do you get from them? To these children, what are grandparents for? What do you think about grandparents?

Ignoring the instructions presented in the normal type face, she responded only to the text in bold. One of the consequences of this reading strategy was that she was able to complete the work required in fewer than five minutes, producing just two sentences of text about her grand-parents. Emily's practice of following the bold instructions and missing the stories, significantly reduces the reading required to complete one of these language sets. In set 11, for example, the literature stimulus material comprised 39 of the 77 pages of school work provided in the set.

Emily's strategies for dealing with the distance education text reflect her preference for activities which are clear and concrete. She is not keen on open-ended activities. Looking back over her work in another set she said:

> I had a bit of trouble writing questions that had to have an opinion for an answer. I found it okay to answer but actually writing them was a bit difficult. When I got stuck Tracey gave me some examples of what I should write and then I told her some and we chose the best one that I said. I think my questions were well set out and well thought out and that I presented it in an original way.

As she says below, Emily has been taught that when she is stuck or confused, she should go on with work she does understand until Tracey is free to help her:

> Tracey says when you get stuck you just go on with something else and tell me, and go on with something else and I'll be there as soon as I can.

In the section of transcript from a mathematics lesson which appears below, Emily realises that she needs help and calls for Tracey's assistance.

EMILY:	Could you guys please get Tracey, please Bill? I need her for this so, I just need her for this.
TRACEY:	I won't be a minute.
EMILY:	Tracey, what do they mean, what is the median?
TRACEY:	Here? The middle spot, like there, okay, but remember you have to put them into order.

With this assistance, Emily was able to begin her work. Tracey moved away, but waited to see if Emily would need more assistance. Emily soon had another question.

EMILY:	It says, what is the median?
TRACEY:	Yes, you want to find out the median mass.
EMILY:	Of what?
TRACEY:	So you have to put them into order first. The smallest, so you've got two of 26, and so, which one's next?
EMILY:	Mmm, and then, that one...
TRACEY:	28...
EMILY:	...then that one...
TRACEY:	...30...
SARAH:	I've done that Tracey.
TRACEY:	So if we write...no, no hang on
EMILY:	...then 36.
TRACEY:	Okay, so which one came in the middle?
EMILY:	Um, thir.., oh, um 28.
TRACEY:	(inaudible) What is the mode? Which mass appears more than once?
EMILY:	Oh, 26.
TRACEY:	What is Damien's mass?
EMILY:	30
TRACEY:	30 what?
EMILY:	30 Kgs
TRACEY:	Mm, which stands for what?
EMILY:	Kilograms

During this section of the lesson, Tracey gives clear, direct and personal assistance to Emily. Although she has two other students to teach, she is able to wait and see if Emily understands her first attempt to help ("The middle spot ... you have to put them in order"). She patiently repeats the instruction

when, as she expected, Emily was not able to complete the work unaided ("you have to put them in order") and she works through the exercise asking leading questions ("you've got two of 26 ... which one's next?") Then, having completed the exercise to find the median, she moves Emily on to the next activity, to find the mode ("Which mass appears more than once?") Teachers in regular classes aim to provide this kind of assistance to every child, teaching directly at the point of error and working the child through difficult concepts individually, but one of the advantages of distance education —especially with a well-informed home tutor—is that this standard of individual attention is more likely to be available on a day to day basis.

Air Lessons

Emily's favourite school activities are air lessons. She finds language "interesting, but not as much as air lesson work". The key issue for Emily seems to be the social aspect of air lessons. As she said, she likes the opportunity of talking with her friends and expressing her opinions:

> I like talking to my friends like, you get, sometimes, to have a conversation with them. And we like answering questions about, having opinions, our opinions on health like social studies, things like that. And like right now we're doing in social studies, community work and we're having our opinions on what should be done in the community and all that.

One of the consequences of distance education generally and air lessons in particular seems to be that students are able to be very explicit about the teaching and learning program. The following extract from a discussion about a health lesson that was about to begin provides an illustration of this explicit understanding:

INT:	So, what's the lesson, it's health isn't it?
EMILY:	Yeah, health.
INT:	Oh good. And what are you working on?
EMILY:	We're working on dangers around the house, because like we did this last week.
INT:	Mm, that was around the garage and kitchen.
EMILY:	Yeah, we, we just discussed what could be wrong in this kitchen and the garage.
INT:	Okay. So what's today's lesson.
EMILY:	Well, this is the same activity because we couldn't get through it all.
INT:	You didn't get it quite finished.
EMILY:	So we go to, go through them all over.
INT:	So you think you'll be starting here do you, on page 9?
EMILY:	Yes.

INT:	Chemicals and poisonous plants. Mm.
EMILY:	And then we just discuss them.
INT:	So you think the teacher will talk about these things this week. What do you think teacher will do?
EMILY:	Um, I think she'll probably just discuss all this again, she just completed, page 9.
INT:	This is homework here, page 9, and it's got lists of dangers and lists of reasons things are dangerous aha?
EMILY:	Yes
INT:	And what are they, where did you get those dangers from?
EMILY:	We got these from the pictures on page 8.
INT:	Right.
EMILY:	And then I think she'll start just explaining about that and telling us what we have just gone through and then she'll probably say a page and then discuss this or something so, I'm not quite sure, where we supposed to do that, so I think she'll be talking about the page 11 and 12.

As this transcript shows, when Emily sits down for her air lesson she knows what topic she will be working on ("dangers around the house"), what was the last activity in her last health lesson ("what could be wrong in this kitchen or garage"), what her homework was ("we got these from the pictures on page 8"), and whether or not the activity was completed ("we couldn't get through it all"). She predicts where in the text the teacher will begin ("page 10"), what she will do ("we just discuss them"), and what pages she will be working on ('she'll be talking about page 11 and 12"). Many children in regular classes, of course, are attentive to the teacher, but few would be better informed than Emily about what work has come before, what will come up today, and what work there still is in the future.

The Language Curriculum

Although Tracey is keen for the girls to organise their own work and "do it by themselves", she sometimes feels she has to intervene when there are faults in the distance education materials. In Natalie's case, for example, the Year 4 mathematics and language programs did not seem to provide her with enough work to do. According to Tracey:

> It was mostly stuff they'd done last year ... There were no new concepts or anything introduced, so she'd sit down and just go and she'd be done and so I said 'We're going to spend, you know, half an hour doing this', and I'd divide it into half hour blocks. But then work started to get a bit more involved, so we didn't need the timetable any more.

Tracey sees some strong differences between the junior primary language materials used by Sarah (Year 2) and the materials used by Natalie (Year 4) and Emily (Year 6):

> Sarah's work is more or less designed for one student, one teacher, I think. There's about six things that they do in language each day and probably about two of them leave the child to complete this on their own. So you have to be constantly with her through the language showing (me) this and asking these questions. It makes it pretty hard to give the other two the attention they need some days.

As a trained teacher, Tracey feels that she should use her own judgement about whether the girls follow the patterns of learning activities laid down in the distance education materials. In her words:

> Sometimes, you look at the way that they've got it all set out and you think 'This is totally wrong for how she's learning'. With Emily's maths sometimes, I've looked at a page and myself thought 'What on earth are they supposed to be doing here?' so, I get out my book and have a look at the answer and then I look at the question. (I think) 'we'll tackle this one this way'. You end up with the same answer but, some of it's just totally wrong for them.
>
> It might be alright for most of the students but with their individual learning differences you can't expect one prescribed method to work for everyone. You saw the book, it says 'Say this this this', you know, 'The child should do all this' and it doesn't work sometimes. So you just have to read through it and you get an idea of what's meant to be done yourself and then you just follow it yourself but (if I) didn't have the training to think like that, like from uni and stuff, (I'd) probably be saying exactly what's written on that page and they would do it in that exact order.

In addition to these concerns about learning styles and individual differences, Tracey has some reservations about the content of the language program. She was concerned that "there is nothing on all the different genres" in the Year 6 program and there was not enough "real writing":

> It gives them a good range of activities that they can do, and they're interesting ... (but) I think, it would help if each set encouraged some sort of real writing. Like one set she had to write a book, which she did a wonderful job of, you know, she wrote the draft and it was a kid's book, and she illustrated it and made it into a book and she had a wonderful time, and the whole ten days basically were based around this book. You know, this is, all your steps in editing and conferencing and all of that were in this one particular set but that's the only one up to Set 11.

Whereas only one of Emily's first eleven sets in Year 6 required extended writing, Sarah's (Year 2) materials had "gone to the other extreme". In Tracey's words:

> One of her sets—she's done descriptions and reports and recounts so far—was just so heavy in the two weeks we would have done five descriptions. You know, the first one was a modelling one that I did some and she did some, and then the very next day she was writing the draft of one, and then she did a good copy of one, and then she did another one, and at the end she was totally fed up. 'I'm not doing another description'. She'd see the page, you know, that had all the sections, 'Oh not another one of them!'.

Like many home tutors involved with both younger and older children, Tracey found it difficult to ration her time among the three girls. As she said:

> What's hard is the fact that with Sarah being in Year 2 you can't give as much attention to the other two as they deserve and you sort of find some days you're a step behind them because they've sat down and done, say, the first activity, and then you get in there and read their answer but they're not thinking about that any more and you sort of feel that they could have given a better response but because you haven't been there right at the minute they're writing it or to talk to them about it then you sort of haven't been able to draw everything out for their answer.

Another frustration for Tracey, as a trained teacher working in the role of a home tutor, is that she doesn't have control over the program. Consequently, there is nothing to base her teaching on and no thinking behind what she does:

> There's nothing really to base it on. Like if I was writing a programme it would be based on the set of standards that you want them to achieve but with this it's all done for you. On the teacher's behalf, there's no thinking behind it. You just have to make sure they get through the work, and make sure that they're understanding what's going on but you sort of can't sit back and think 'Well, this is what they should have achieved by now, can they do it?'. You don't have anything like that to go on.

Conclusion

Emily Baker does her distance learning in a well organised and resource-rich environment. She and her sisters have a full-time governess who is a recently-trained primary school teacher. They work in a well established school house which is equipped and decorated like a regular school. The family expectations are that Emily will go away to boarding school for high school, and that she will continue to TAFE or university if she wishes. The Baker family buy the books they need, and there are many books in the school room.

Emily sees herself as "about average" as a learner and as a reader, but "pretty good" as a writer. She prefers language to mathematics, and has learned to be a self directed distance education student. When she needs help with her work, she waits for her governess to be free from giving assistance to her younger sisters. She rates "concentration" as the most important aspect of reading and "expression" as the most important aspect of writing. She does not distinguish different strategies for reading and writing fiction and informational texts. Getting her work finished quickly is very important to Emily. She uses her knowledge of the textual conventions of the distance education materials to reduce the amount of reading that she has to do, and focuses on completing the tasks which her governess has listed as essential. She expects that her governess will tell her whether her work is good enough to send in to the school to be marked, or whether she has more work to do.

She pays relatively little attention to the feedback provided by the school, looking first for the stickers pasted on her work. By the time her work is returned, either by post or modem, she regards it as finished and no longer interesting. Most of the contact with the school is through the daily medium of air lessons. Air lessons are her favourite part of her school work. She enjoys the opportunities to hear her friends talk and to give her opinions. One of the other consequences of her participation in air lessons is that she has a highly explicit understanding of the relationship between the texts, the teachers' behaviour and the work requirements. She telephones the school occasionally, but usually in connection with procedural matters. On questions of teaching and learning, she relies on the one-to-one attention of her governess.

Emily's governess has some reservations about the curriculum materials the school provides them. The materials provided for the Year 2 child are designed for one-to-one teaching and require her to be with the student "constantly". The Year 4 language materials do not seem to provide enough work, and the Year 6 materials have too little emphasis on informational texts and too little continuous writing.

CHAPTER 9
CASE STUDY 3: JUSTIN BEARD

Judith Rivalland

Grassland is situated in the remote south of Western Australia. The primary school, which is located about 150 kms from any regional centre, has two full time teachers, a school principal and a registrar who is French speaking and is thus able to help the students with their French studies. Sheep and cattle grazing and some cereal crops provide the economic base for the surrounding farming community, which has been badly effected by drought in the past couple of years. As I turned off the bitumen towards the school I was met by a large emu standing in the middle of the dirt track. It sauntered off the road and I drove on to find a very attractive small school located near the local wheat silo. The school bus had already arrived and children were cheerfully playing around the school waiting for the school day to begin. When I entered the school I was struck by the informality and friendliness. Children moved in and out of the staff room with ease and the teachers chatted to students with a sense of familiarity not usually found in schools. It was immediately evident that this was a school where the teachers new their students intimately.

Justin, the 15 year old son of the school principal, is studying Year 9 by distance education. The two other children in Justin's family attend the Grassland primary school. Colin is in Year 7 and Jacquie in Year 4. Mrs Beard and the children live in the principal's house at Grassland and Mr Beard, also a teacher, is the principal of another school 100 kms away. Mr Beard usually travels to Grassland for Wednesday evenings. On weekends he meets the family at their farm located around 80 kms away. The farm is a serious farming operation which is not entirely viable, but the family hope it will become so. Presently they feel they don't have sufficient time on the weekends to operate the farm on a full commercial basis, but they do as much as they can in the time they have available. Mr Beard hopes to be able to retire from teaching and take up farming on a full time basis when they get the property fully developed. The family all enjoy the lifestyle and like the involvement with the farm. In his spare time, Justin likes to train sheep dogs and ride the motor bike around the farm to help his father with the sheep:

> Well because we've got a farm, basically everything revolves around that on the weekends when we all get together. So because we live apart through the week, the family is split up through the week for work, we mainly do farm work on the weekends. We check the sheep.

Mr and Mrs Beard have done most of their teaching in rural areas, some of it in remote Aboriginal communities. In some cases the children's education was not well catered for, and this is the reason why Justin is 15 years old and is still doing Year 9 work. Mr Beard enjoys life in rural communities and Mrs Beard doesn't mind one way or the other:

> It's not necessarily my choice. I'm lucky in the fact that I really don't mind where I live. So I'd be quite happy to live in Perth and I don't mind it here, it's alright.

To compensate for the isolated lifestyle of their children, the Beards have decided to give each child the opportunity to travel to a destination of their choice when they turn fifteen. Justin chose to travel to Europe because he is good at French and wanted to see France. When I visited, Mrs Beard and Justin had just returned from their European holiday, for which Mrs Beard had taken her long service leave. They enjoyed the trip immensely and Justin was very pleased that his French was good enough to be understood in France.

Mrs Beard is quite satisfied with Justin's school progress:

> I think he's going well. I think probably the only disadvantages he's got is not mixing with other kids and it's a definite disadvantage. I think that he's a good student. Working at the primary school, he's got the advantage of having the facilities. I mean he uses the phone and it's pretty good having his own phone in there in his own little room.

Later in the conversation she went on to express further concerns about Justin's social development:

> MRS BEARD: Well I think when you're 15 you like to have friends your own age. You know he's finding in the holidays he gets together with a few mates but I think you can get very lonely. I mean at this stage I think he's so busy with his work at school and then going home on weekends to the farm, but I think there is always something missing if you haven't got friends you can talk to and you know ...
>
> INT: I suppose it's sort of your development of your own identity to some extent.
>
> MRS BEARD: Yes, I mean he's always sort of, because he's always sort of, well if before we were here, he was sort of an odd man out in an Aboriginal school. So during the three years he was in an Aboriginal school he was the odd man out there. Totally different way of life they had and ...

Aspirations

Justin intends to finish Year 10 by distance education and will then go to boarding school in Perth in order to complete Year 12. His mother says she has never pushed him towards a professional career, in fact in some ways she has encouraged him to think of other options:

> I'm totally unbiased and um whereas I was encouraged to head in a professional, towards a professional career I have even probably encouraged him more towards a trade. I mean it probably sounds a bit different.

However she feels he is a good student who will probably finish Year 12 and go on to tertiary studies. She thinks he is very determined and if he keeps up his marks he may realise his ambition to become a vet. On the other hand, Mrs Beard does not want to push him in that direction: "He seems keen to but I've always tried to express that I don't mind what they do. Justin does seem to be a dedicated student". As he puts it, "I mean, because I'm interested, I only want to get good marks in my subjects". He explained how he does all of his tests under supervision even though he knows that some students don't, "I've heard of students who are over here, they will do their test any day and answer (inaudible) and things like that and then send it off and things like that". He went on to tell me how he did not see how this could be helpful because it did not allow students to monitor their work accurately:

> I mean they're really important because they're your end of unit assessment things so I mean if you're not so good a student and you go brilliantly in your tests it's not really a true picture of what you are.

Justin's determination to do well and to get good marks appears to have been the driving force behind the development of a range of self-monitoring strategies he uses to make sure he is meeting the expectations of his supervisors:

> You have to, on distance education you're either interested in it, or you're not. You can't really get pushed because I mean, after a certain while, everybody's going to give up. I know the supervisor will give up. I know the parents will give up and I know it's, so it's self motivation you need to have on distance education or you're not going to get anywhere with English, you're not going to get anywhere with maths.

Through his motivation he has developed an understanding of the "hidden curriculum" of schooling. In the process he has worked out the practices approved of by the teachers and sanctioned by the institution of schooling. Justin wants to be an A student. In the following conversation, he demonstrates his sophisticated insights into sanctioned school practices:

INT: And what sort of things do you think you have to do in order to be an A grade student?

JUSTIN: In English?

INT: Yes.

JUSTIN: Oh, that's a tough one. It depends on the teacher a lot. I know I was getting all A's with the teacher before this one and then I've got all B's with this one and I don't honestly think that I've changed a lot.

INT: So what sort of things do you think they look at that's different between the two teachers? How do you know why one teacher gave you an A and one teacher gave you a B?

JUSTIN: That's hard. I suppose it's because one was looking for a bit more but I guess it's just that the teacher that I had before, she liked it personally because it was the stories that she sort of was interested in herself.

INT: Right.

JUSTIN: But this teacher, he doesn't seem to be that interested in the topics that I write about. Perhaps that's it. I'm not sure. I didn't think my level had changed but I guess he might just be trying to improve me a little bit more.

He continued by commenting, "My teachers are very critical if I make a mistake in spelling and punctuation and everything like that, not just in English either".

Family Literacy Practices

Reading

The family's involvement with farming on the weekend leaves them little time for reading. Justin only has time to read about one book every 8 weeks. The children have a family library of about 100 books and also have ready access to the local school library. Justin enjoys reading non-fiction or realistic fiction and he gets books sent out from the nearest library by the mail run. The last book he read apart from his English novels was *The Call of the Wild*. Before he went on his trip to Europe, Justin did some research into "history and wars so wherever he was, the places he knew was where he was going". When they were young, Mr and Mrs Beard always read the children a story in the morning and at night:

> We've always read them a story in the morning and at night usually. Sort of a couple of times a day. That's usually a sort of a Christian type reading that we'd have in the morning or at night with them but they've sort of always been read to or one of the kids will read it. Usually at least once a day we do that sort of reading together.

However Mrs Beard felt Justin had not been a very good reader until he started on distance education. In recent years Mr and Mrs Beard have been so busy they haven't had time to do much reading except for work purposes. Consequently they have "got out of the habit of reading".

Writing

Mrs Beard upgraded her Diploma of Education to a Bachelor of Education through external studies at Edith Cowan University and she had recently completed a Diploma of Human Resources Management through external studies at Monash University. She thought this might offer her another career opportunity if she decided she did not want to continue teaching for the rest of her working life. She found the management course very difficult because she had to get used to a new way of thinking and new terminology. Mr Beard only does writing associated with his work or with the management of the farm. The children sometimes write letters to family members and Justin regularly corresponds in French with a French pen friend. When he was travelling, Justin and his mother kept a photo journal in which they wrote descriptions of places on the back of photographs or the entrance tickets of places they visited.

Television and Computers

Television does not play an important role in the Beard family. The children watch some of the children's shows in the late afternoon and then the family watch the news and current affairs:

> [It] usually starts at about 5.30 PM. Sometimes the kids watch the quiz shows. I don't like them watching the violent sort of movies. Then the news. Perhaps once a week we might watch *Real Life* but that's about it. (Inaudible). That'd be the main things.

The family enjoy comedies like *Dad's Army* or *Fools and Horses* and may watch the occasional movie.

The Beards have just bought a new home computer which also has a CD-ROM on it. The children all use it to do their essays for school and for doing research for any school projects. Mrs Beard uses it to do her school-related work and she used their previous computer for completing her assignments. The children also like to play computer games. They haven't had time to get many games for their new computer, so currently they are not able to spend much time playing games on it. Justin obviously was very comfortable using the

school computer and does many of his assignments on either the home or school computer.

Doing Distance Education

Justin usually goes to his study room about 8 00 AM each day and prepares his things for the day. He then gets started on his work at 8 30 AM. He begins his work without any supervision because at that time of the day his mother is busy with the other children in the school. The room in which he works is a store room which has been converted to serve the dual function of store room and a study for Justin. He has a large desk located next to a book case on which all of his materials are organised. Above his desk there were photographs of his distance education teachers as well as notes and his timetable. A hands free telephone was placed on the right hand side of his desk next to an Apple Macintosh computer and printer which are set on a computer desk. The computer belongs to the primary school so it is used by other children at times and is used regularly by the Year 6 and Year 7 children when they study French by telematics. Justin has ready access to the school library where he can also make use of the video recorder and television whenever he needs to.

Organisation

Justin feels that learning to organise his work has been the most difficult part of doing distance education: "My first semester was when I first started here in Year 8 was pretty hard going because it was the first time I'd done anything like this and it was quite hard". He has a tutor who comes in to help him from 9.00 AM to 12 midday every Monday. He feels her assistance is essential: "Oh yeah, I couldn't do without her". She helps him work out his timetable each week and then goes through any problems Justin had in the previous week's work. During the week he sticks tabs on to any problems in his work and then the tutor deals with them on Mondays. Even with this amount of support he has found problems managing his time: "They don't really give you enough information on how much time you should spend on each subject so you sort of, I mean they tell you that you need to finish a book in a fortnight but you sort of have to regulate it". He has sometimes found it difficult to meet deadlines because the mail takes a week to get to Perth or because public holidays are not accounted for in the timetable. Justin has obviously established a very clear overview of the structures of all of his subjects and the relationship between his regional co-ordinator, his tutor, his distance education teachers and his mother as the home tutor. He was able to explain the function of each of these people with great clarity. He also has a very good understanding of his timetable and school program:

JUSTIN: Yes. See my regional co-ordinator asked me to draw up a time table of what I planned to do up until the end of the year and I knew that off by heart and I just threw it out. So I guess so but ...

INT: But it's learning how to do that that was difficult?

JUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. There wasn't much help with that and I just had to sort of make it up myself.

INT: So who did help you with that when you first started out?

JUSTIN: Well my mum and um mainly my mum and my supervisor helped me as well. They helped me with the time table and I figured out what I liked about the time table and I like big blocks instead of path changeovers.

INT: So you like to really take something and really get it finished?

JUSTIN: Yeah, otherwise I get a bit depressed after a day if I don't think I've done much you know.

Resolving Problems

Justin has well organised strategies for dealing with problems. When he can't solve a problem he usually asks his mother for help. If she can't resolve the difficulty he then rings his teacher in Perth. However, this does not always enable him to get a full understanding of the solution so he sometimes needs to refer the issue on to his tutor. He has found the telephone calls to his teachers in Perth are often better for dealing with organisational difficulties than the clarification of ideas. During the time I spent with him, he made a phone call to his maths teacher which very successfully helped him plan the rest of his maths program for the remainder of the year. The teacher clarified where he was up to, then discussed how much work he was going to complete during Semester two and checked whether or not his working rate was fast enough to achieve that. She then explained the arrangements for completing work at the end of the year. The following excerpt from that conversation shows how the teacher negotiated the end of year marking and checked Justin's working rate:

TEACHER: There's another three weeks after that, we still take work and mark it but it means that your result, you don't get the bit of paper until next year. It actually gives you some extra time to keep going and finish it. It would be good if you could finish it this year.

JUSTIN: I definitely will yeah. Because I've been working a book a week and I've got seven weeks next term and I should be able to do it then.

TEACHER Oh, if you're going through a book a week it should fit perfectly. I worked that out for somebody else.

JUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

TEACHER: How's it going?

JUSTIN: Oh it's going good. Yeah, I like doing that bit more work in that other text book as well. That's been pretty good.

Justin was very satisfied with this conversation and told me, "Yeah, I've got it all, the work with me now, so that's great. Yeah, I'm up to date so that's good". When he used the telephone to try and resolve two more complex problems with his teachers, he did not feel nearly as satisfied with the outcome of those two conversations - even though he was able to continue with his work. On the first of these occasions he was having trouble understanding the instructions about a diagram and experiment in electronics. He could not find certain parts of a dry cell which were named in the text. The teacher told him "you've just got to use your initiative on that one. It's a very bad question". So Justin moved on to the next problem, which related to being unable to find, in his resource box, a switch which is referred to in the text as though he were required to make use of it. The teacher explained how he did not need the switch to do the experiment because the switch was mentioned merely to show the need for a control device - yet the text was quite unclear about it. The discussion resolved the problem to some extent but left Justin feeling confused because he did not really understand the explanation provided. In this extract of the conversation, notice how Justin told the teacher about his confusion and then gave up on the issue:

JUSTIN: Okay. With that experiment, the above one, was there, I think we had everything except we don't have a switch.

TEACHER: The switch?

JUSTIN: Yeah.

TEACHER: What do you want a switch for?

JUSTIN: Well in question l page 11 it says 'on the diagram switch'.

TEACHER: You won't need it for the experiment though. Okay?

JUSTIN: Okay, thanks. It's just a bit confusing.

TEACHER: But if you have that sort of a system, you've got to have an input, a control and an output but basically the input is the electricity, all right?

JUSTIN: Okay.

TEACHER: The control is the switch and that the switch is mentioned is to show you that there is a control there and that's the control device, your switch. Okay?

JUSTIN: Okay, yeah, it's just a bit confusing.

TEACHER: All right? No other problems?

He was dissatisfied when he finished the phone call and continued discussing the question with me in an effort to clarify it for himself. During this discussion with me, he explained how he had done similar experiments in science. By telling me about what he had done previously, he satisfied himself about the meaning of the text. Notice Justin's determination to clarify the issue in the following exchange. He is not satisfied to just complete a task unless he really understands it:

INT:	So that, here, he was saying that you didn't, I can't see how you're supposed to do that experiment though if you don't have a switch. Can you see how?
JUSTIN:	No.
INT:	Or will this mean that once you've connected it up it just keeps on, so I mean you can't stop it or what?
JUSTIN:	I guess, usually, what I do with anything in Science, anything with a switch, I just have the copper and zinc and the (inaudible) solution in the beaker and I have these two outlet wires and it wasn't joined to a switch and it wasn't joined to a light globe and it lit up so I guess they go to the switch then you press that down on the switch and you get the electrical unit.
INT:	And is this the ampmeter here?
JUSTIN:	Yeah.
INT:	I see, so without the switch it would just go straight through to the amp meter.
JUSTIN:	I guess I have to be a lateral thinker or otherwise you'd die here.

Another example of Justin's tenacity was shown when he was trying to complete a maths problem in which the diagram was out of proportion and unclear. He was being asked to find whether or not triangles were similar to one another. He decided to ask his mother for help. After quite a lengthy conversation his mother asked him to show her an example from the book which she could copy. This did not help very much however. She suggested Justin call his teacher. In the following transcript, notice how Mrs Beard and Justin approached the problem as equals, with Mrs Beard attempting to clarify the question by looking at a model and then asking Justin to explain it to her:

MRS BEARD:	I don't understand this one. Where's an example in the book that I can copy from?
JUSTIN:	This book. It's just here.
MRS BEARD:	Well I wouldn't even have thought those triangles were similar. Sorry, I think you'd better ring up for this one.

JUSTIN: Okay. On the instructions it says 'State the two triangles that are similar to each other'.

MRS BEARD: (Overspeaking/inaudible) state the two triangles that are similar to each other. They must be if they say there's two that are similar. It's just that that angle there is just so much bigger than this one.

JUSTIN: Spin around to the back and you can see from the back.

MRS BEARD: Yeah, I'm sorry. I don't understand that one I don't think. (Inaudible) lengths of x and y. X and y. Yeah sorry I can't remember how to do that.

Justin immediately rang up his teacher who was not there, but when he persisted he was given assistance by one of the other teachers. He showed considerable maturity in the way he negotiated to get the assistance of another teacher. The teacher began explaining how the diagram gave an invalid picture of the problem, but then when she had difficulty explaining the problem she resorted to telling him how to answer it. Notice the confusion in the exchange below and the way the teacher resolved it by providing the answer:

TEACHER: It's a diagram, so, I mean you're looking at the diagram, and yes it does look bigger but you don't take note of that.

JUSTIN: It won't matter that in your setting out you will have TV over VU equals SU over TV ...

TEACHER: Slow down a little bit. You've got TV ...

JUSTIN: No sorry TU over VU

TEACHER: Mm

JUSTIN: Equals SU over TU. It won't matter that you're repeating yourself. There will also be in here (inaudible) ST over TV.

TEACHER: Well why don't you ... I'll give you Y over 7 equals 10 over 4 equals 4 over x is what you should have.

JUSTIN: Y over 7 equals 4 over x equals 10 over TU

INT: 7

TEACHER: 10 over 4

JUSTIN: 10 over 4

TEACHER: Okay, can you work it from there?

JUSTIN: Yes, right.

After the conversation was concluded, Justin commented: "It helps you to get it right but she didn't really explain". Clearly, Justin is a very responsible self monitoring student who has constructed a practice of understanding his work

as well as "getting it done". He finds it quite frustrating when he can't get a satisfactory explanation to his problems. This is why he believes it is so important to have the help of a tutor, who can explain things fully in a way that cannot necessarily be achieved by telephone. Justin confirmed this construction of learning when he discussed how he monitored his progress through "marks first and discussions with the teachers". Nevertheless, Justin demonstrated the capacity to use the available resources to the best of his ability. He has developed a great deal of confidence in using the telephone to access his teachers.

Materials and Resources

Because Justin is so interested in his work and really tries to understand what he is doing, he was able to make some interesting comments about the materials. He has found some of the practical subjects like technical drawing extremely difficult because it is hard to understand how to do such things by reading about them:

> Um, I'm not sure. I found tech drawing really difficult to do without anybody showing me. They didn't even do a video demonstrating lesson. That was really hard.

He also had no-one to ask for help because his mother had never done anything like it herself. Mrs Beard commented:

> Well usually one of the main other problems, two other problems that have arisen, one with woodwork and the other was with tech drawing. Now both of those things are pretty hard, especially the tech drawing. Because I had no background in it, it's not something that you could do over the phone and so basically he scraped through that unit and then dropped it because he just couldn't understand it. And really there should have been some sort of video. I mean I'm getting off the track a bit here but there should have been, I mean a video would have been so easy to do just to get the basics of the tech drawing.

Justin feels the *Live Science* program available on GWN makes science more interesting and easier to understand. He thinks the science program is well set out, interesting and does a good job of linking the science concepts to relevant issues in his life:

> Yeah. Like they were discussing the option of atomic energy and things like that and they really made it seem relevant to you whereas this is different this one, but they could be linking this to something that was relevant as well.

He enjoys maths because he is interested and good at it, however he does not like the spiral curriculum approach because he would prefer to do something

properly the first time rather than continually returning to a more difficult aspect of something he has done before. He discussed this with me as follows:

JUSTIN: Well they'll touch on an issue and they don't, I think it's just what distance education do, they'll, like say you're doing the area of a triangle, trying to find it and then they'll go and they'll be doing a little bit of algebra, then they'll do something else.

INT: So they do a little bit of it and then they pick that topic up again later in a more complex way and you don't like that?

JUSTIN: No. I'd like to sort of stay on it until you learn the whole thing yeah.

INT: Right. Mm. You'd like to get hold of the ...

JUSTIN: Concept a little bit better before they change it.

Although Justin is quite interested in social studies he finds the materials annoying at times because he feels they often expect him to re-do things he has just learned and understood. In the following transcript Justin explained how he felt he already understood about the rising crime rate in Australia from the notes he had studied and that it was a waste of time having to write about exactly the same things he had just learned:

> Like it says 'Write a page and a half to two page report for a local newspaper on the rising rate of crime in Australia today. Give your article a catchy title so that people will want to read it. In the first section show the rising crime rate is a serious problem in Australia. In the second section discuss some of the more important causes of crime today. In the final section suggest some measures that would help to reduce the rate of crime.' Well, I don't know, it's just that, well people know that there is a serious crime rate and some of the causes of crime today, well they've just gone over it and I've had it inside out and all through here and now I've just got to write about. It just makes me angry that something that you know about is ...

There are telematics facilities available to the students in the Grassland Primary school, so Justin has access to telematics programs to study French. However, because he studied French in Years 6 and 7, he found he was more advanced than most of the other high school students, so he prefers to work on his French by himself. He is very confident about French and asks for assistance from the school registrar if he needs any help. He would like to be able to practise speaking French in a more informal way by holding tele-conferences with other students. He also suggested that it would be really helpful if he could do some of the drama and debating activities in English through tele-conference discussions with other students. He felt this would make these activities much more challenging because there would be a real

audience for sharing or challenging ideas. In contrast, when these activities are done on an audio tape they seem to be rather silly because there is no-one to provide immediate feedback or respond to his ideas.

On the day I visited Justin, the Year 6 and 7 students were involved in a French lesson using telematics. Since the computer and the "hands free" telephone are kept in Justin's room, I was present during the lesson. Justin took an interest in the children's work and assisted a number of them by getting materials for them. He has obviously forged a good relationship with the children in the school. There were some difficulties establishing contact with the other children in the telematics class in the initial part of the lesson, after which the teacher greeted all of the children in French. She then attempted to work with a program on the computer but there were technical difficulties which prevented this from occurring. The teacher was then forced to improvise, so she asked the children to continue with a photo story which they were going to complete for submission. This entailed much rushing around on the part of the children to get paper, glue and their photograph. The teacher instructed the children how to write their photo story. This was a complex task so most of the instructions were given in English. Time ran out very quickly, so the teacher exchanged farewells in French and the lesson was concluded without any further opportunity for the children to speak French. Obviously Telematics offer a wonderful resource for such lessons provided the technology does not fail.

The discussions I held with Justin about his perceptions of the usefulness of the materials suggested that he found the materials very helpful but a little tedious at times. To him, it seemed he was sometimes asked to do things which he already knew. When I asked him if he ever negotiated to do something different when he felt an activity was unnecessary, he responded: "I have but they can't, they haven't really got anything else that I can do apart from the course". Justin is an able student who realises the importance of completing his work successfully if he wants to gain good marks. He has been constructed to be an obedient learner, because this is part of what is required to be an A student. For him, authority lies with the text and the activities. As yet he has not considered the possibility of challenging the authority of the text, as part of extending his own learning practices. He demonstrated his insecurity about challenging the text in the following discussion I had with him, when he was asked to write about the growing crime rate in Australia. Notice that he can understand how there could be another "reading" of the text but he was not sure whether or no this would be acceptable to the teacher.

INT:	So that's the only way they've got to assess it.
JUSTIN:	Yeah. And I guess I think it's a good idea but I mean they say 'Show the rate of rising crime in Australia' you know there is a rate, like a high rate of crime in Australia.
INT:	But that's only what they say isn't it?

JUSTIN: I wonder if you could, do you think you could? I'm not sure.

School Practices

English

Justin began his English studies without any assistance from his mother. He had photocopied the pages out of his study guide because he finds it difficult to read the parts on the back of the pages. He has found it helps him to know how much effort to put into an activity, if he firstly checks the number of marks the activity are worth. He was working on an activity related to the novel *The October Child*. In this novel, one of the characters is an autistic child. In the guide, the children had been asked to read some information about autism and then complete the following task.

> **TASK C**
>
> How closely does Carl fit the above description of an autistic child? For instance, what evidence is there in the novel for him being any or all of he following:
>
> - overly possessive
> - resistant to change
> - repetitive in his behaviour
> - outwardly normal in a physical sense
> - stressful to those who have to care for him?

Justin had already marked different parts in the novel which he thought demonstrated the characteristics of autism. He told me how he usually looks closely at the questions in order to establish exactly what is being asked, then finds some quotes to provide some "evidence" and adds some of his own opinions to support his answer. In the following transcript, notice how he explained the process he uses to clarify questions and supply his answers:

> Well I usually go through with a highlighter and well, for this task it says 'How closely does Carl fit the above description of an autistic child?' For instance what evidence would that word 'evidence' be generally known to mean? Do they want you to pick something out of the passage so you have to back that up with quotations and stuff like that. 'Is there any (inaudible) any or the following' and they've listed it there. So, then I just add a bit more to that by putting my personal opinion.

With great confidence he switched on the computer and began to type up his answers. He was obviously very accustomed to using a word processor to complete his written work. While he was writing his response he discussed the important things that have to be taken into account in order to write a good essay. In the following discussion notice how Justin has worked out exactly

how to satisfy the teachers by "sticking to the point" and elaborating and giving "your personal ideas":

JUSTIN: Ah, generally I just stick to the point. That's what my English teacher says and my social studies teacher likes me to include nothing but bare facts sort of thing and not waffle on in social studies, but in English they like to elaborate and get a lot of your personal ideas in the topic.

INT: Do you think they want you to recognise the sort of stance, a sort of value that the writer has when they, or in a book like that?

JUSTIN: Yeah they do. Ah, I just (inaudible) and the and it was written, the narrator, they asked what feelings the narrator would have ah, to write this book and things like that so yeah ...

Generally Justin appears to enjoys the set novels in English, although he had found the particular unit he was working on a "bit gruesome":

> This unit is a bit gruesome. It's um, it's pretty depressing really. They've done this whole unit on, it's sort of like death. There's pets dying and old ladies lonely. There's autistic children. It's pretty bad really, but yeah, they're pretty good, the novels that they have to read. They're pretty interesting.

When Justin finished writing his responses, he edited his work and then printed it. The completed piece of work is shown on the following page:

Teacher Date: 14-9-94

Student

Unit: 5.2

Lesson Paper: 1
Task C

Resistant to change
I believe that Carl was resistant to change as when he was taken to his grandmothers place in Sydney and put in a strange cot the novel said that, "Carl was crouched at one end of the cot, every inch of him quivering with the intensity of rage, and his small head was banging furiously and rapidly against the wooden panel beside him".

Repetitive in his behaviour
In chapter three of the novel on page 37 it is made quite clear to the reader that Carl does tend to be some what repetitive in his behaviour.
"The opening between the living-room side with an assortment of toys, empty tins, and plastic beakers which Carl had thrown over. It was his favourite-and least destructive occupation".
More evidence of Carls repetitive behaviour is on page 142.
"Having shut it, he wanted to open it again. Then shut it-and open it..."

Outwardly normal in a physical sense
Carl is shown during the whole book to be quite normal in a physical sense for instance in chapter four he is dpescribed as "the best looking kid".
He is again shown to be quite physicaly normal on page 55 when Carl's grandmother said, "And Carls such a good looking boy".

Stressful to those who have to care for him
Carl certainly was a stressful child, "She looked exhausted. There were dark shadows around her eyes..."
That was the discription given of Carls mother after a day of looking after him. Through the entire novel their are cases of Carl's behaviour being stressful to those around him.

Social Studies

When Justin had finished his English he immediately started on his social studies. In social studies he has decided it is important to "stick to the facts" because that is what counts for the teacher. So he has constructed a practice of finding the facts in the text and then using these to complete the activities:

> Oh well, generally I just, sometimes if I have to I will go back and highlight the main points. Sometimes I do that but with this one it's really only emphasising what I have already done in the previous activities and it's sort of ...

He has worked out with his supervisor that he does not have sufficient time to complete all of the non-assessable activities, so he just reads these through because they are quite easy and then finishes the tasks for which marks are assigned:

JUSTIN:	No, um, my supervisor told me not to fill in these and that was because she said there was no marks for them so I did fill them in once before and she said not to do it because there's no marks for them.
INT:	Are you going to have to send that whole book in to be marked?
JUSTIN:	No. Only the yellow sheets. I cut them out.
INT:	And if you filled those in, when you did fill them in, did you find that it made it easier for you to do the assessment tape?
JUSTIN:	No, I found it, I found it, it took up more of my time and I didn't get time to finish all the assessment activities. So she said it was better for me to do that than do those.

Justin was working on a unit of work called "Law and Life". He had been reading about crime rates in Australia, and he was expected to write a response to the following question, "Do you think the copy-cat theory is important. In this example explain the cause of crime ". He naturally assumed that he should agree with the copy-cat theory because the information provided in the text had provided statistics to demonstrate how crime in Australia has increased. Since he believes the text is the authority he sought the facts from the text in order to provide evidence to support the position he had taken. He showed a good knowledge of the genre of exposition and the importance of substantiating his arguments. Notice how he explained these issues to me in the following discussion:

JUSTIN:	I've got to 'Briefly explain in your own words what is meant by the copy-cat theory'.
INT:	Oh, I see.
JUSTIN:	And 'Do you think the copy-cat theory is important. In this example explain the cause of crime', yeah.
INT:	So how are you going to work out your answer to that one?
JUSTIN:	Well I'll say that it is important. It is a cause of crime.
INT:	And why do you think that?
JUSTIN:	Well I'll say that they get a lot of their ideas from what they see, what they hear on TV and what they hear from their friends, and seeing what

they read in books I guess, and yeah, I'll back it up with that.

When I suggested it would be possible to argue a different position on this question, he agreed with me, but was unsure about whether or not this would be acceptable to the teacher. He believes, what counts for the teacher is the ability for students to demonstrate they have learned the facts in the text. His belief in the authority of the text was further confirmed in another discussion in which he explained the previous task. He had been asked to "Imagine you are a crime reporter for a daily newspaper. Your editor has asked you to write a short article for the weekend edition on two offences against a person". In the following transcript Justin described how he thought he had written the newspaper report without any bias, but when I challenged him on the issue he demonstrated the capacity to recognise the way values are constructed through texts, although he felt it was safer to "stick to the facts" in social studies:

JUSTIN: Yeah, I see. I guess I could have been a bit biased there. I mean do I, just, I just, I put it as if the police were there and everybody sort of bashed the police up so ...

INT: But we don't know why. Because that's what, when you read reports about South Africa before when Apartheid was there, the press always report things like that and yet there were all these thousands of black people who weren't allowed.

JUSTIN: Yeah. I never thought of it like that yeah.

Science

Justin told me he was not doing any science at the time because they were changing over programs and in the future he would be doing science through the *Live Science* program on the television. He was really looking forward to the new program because he finds science very interesting. He is obviously an able science student as he has been selected from students all over the state to go to a special science talent camp in the Christmas Vacation. He was delighted with his success at winning a place in this program.

Maths

Justin was very focussed when he did maths. He read through the text very quickly and moved straight on to the examples in the special maths book which accompanied the text. He did not have any difficulty in understanding the maths concepts and appeared to be working at a level beyond which his mother could always help him: "Sorry mate, I just don't understand those any more. Haven't seen them for a long time". However, this does not usually cause difficulties for Justin. When he has problems he usually saves them up for his tutor when she comes on Mondays. He has a strongly established practice of ensuring that he understands what he is doing. As was

demonstrated in the telephone conversation previously cited, he does get frustrated if he can't get a satisfactory explanation to his problems.

Conclusion

Justin is an able, highly motivated and autonomous learner who works in a supportive and friendly environment. Available to him are the resources of a primary school library, computer and telematics technology. He has established an equitable relationship with his mother, who helps him with his work when she can or suggests alternate ways of resolving any difficulties. Justin has learned to match his school learning practices to the expectations of his teachers. He appears to have become quite expert at recognising how these practices need to differ between subject areas. What counts for Justin is getting good marks because he wants to do well at school so he can become a veterinary scientist. As far as he is concerned, it is up to him to make sure he completes his work satisfactorily, so he has developed very effective problem solving strategies to make sure he understands what he is learning. His focus on meeting the expectations of the teacher appears to have led to a belief in the authority of the text, which serves him well, but does not allow him to do any critical analysis of what he is learning. In many ways there is a strong similarity between the school practices of Justin and those of some school-based students whose teachers encourage a text based approach to learning without any mediation of the text.

CHAPTER 10
CASE STUDY 4: PETA CAMERON

Judith Rivalland

As I drove along the 250 kms of sealed road before reaching the turn-off to Coronation Springs, there were many dead cattle on the side of the road. I left the bitumen to drive the 50 kms in to Coronation Springs and it was evident that the property was well cared for and fully fenced. When I arrived, the children were watching television and Mrs Cameron emerged from the kitchen dressed in riding clothes. She told me she had just come in from working with the cattle. We had a cup of tea and chatted about the distance education program. Mrs Cameron told me about the three children in the family, Peta (Year 6), Dwyer (Year 3) and Michelle (Year 2). She explained how they had tried using the school of the air, but it did not suit the family because they like to run the school timetable at different times from those of the school of the air. She likes to run the school program the same way as it was run when she studied by distance education:

> We had the same... We used to do school from seven to twelve every Monday to Friday and I, if got all my work, when I got older and I was in high school, because I always liked to be with Dad. If I got my work done and finished a day, I could go with Dad. But if I hadn't finished I wasn't allowed.

From the conversation I gained the impression that the school of the air parents have a strong sense of solidarity which sometimes excludes the other distance education parents.

Mrs Cameron grew up on Coronation Springs where her parents were the station managers. When her parents left the station she went with them, but always hankered after the station way of life. Her husband grew up on a small property in the south west of Western Australia, but his family did not have enough land to keep all of the boys on the property. After being drafted and serving in Vietnam, he went to Queensland to work on cattle properties. Mr and Mrs Cameron went to the Kimberley to manage a different property. Later they took over the management of Coronation Springs. While they were managing the station it came up for sale, so they decided to purchase it in partnership with a neighbour. Although it is hard work, they are delighted to have had this opportunity and feel things have worked out quite well. The drought hasn't effected them badly and they have been able to upgrade the homestead into a very attractive modern home with a separate school room and visitors' quarters. Around the homestead there is a large garden and lawn as well as a very well kept vegetable garden. Their current governess, who has

a university degree in land care, takes a great deal of pride in the upkeep of the vegetable garden.

Mrs Cameron studied by distance education until the end of Year 9, when her mother sent her to Kobeelya, a boarding school for students who had a particular interest in equestrian work. She did not like being away from home and refused to go back after the first year. Mr Cameron completed Year 10, and went to an agricultural college as part of a retraining program when he returned from Vietnam. He found the focus of the program to be on agriculture and not cattle, so he left after one term. Both parents are dedicated to life in the Kimberley. Mr Cameron's brother now lives nearby and they are anxious for their children to stay in the region:

> Nothing is like it what I used to think it was. It's all changed. I'm frightened to send them to school down there, drugs and grog and...it's alright if the kid has got a strong willpower but if the willpower's not there, you know, they can easily be led. They're vulnerable, you know.

When the muster is on, Mr Cameron is not at home for most of the time. "Last weekend I had Saturday and Sunday off, the first time in, three months," he said. The children often spend a lot of time going camping with their uncle. As Mrs Cameron said, "they'll go down and pitch a tent. They won't come home for four days in the holidays, they'll go down the whole week". The family all have an avid interest in riding and compete regularly in rodeos all over the Kimberley. Hundreds of winner's ribbons were proudly displayed in the lounge room. Although Mr Cameron feels he is getting a little old for riding in rodeos, he is on the rodeo committee and the rest of the family are still competing. Both Mrs Cameron and Peta also help with the cattle on a regular basis. Peta is a very accomplished rider and obviously enjoys the chance to get out and help with the station chores whenever she has finished her school work.

Aspirations

The Camerons are anxious to give their children the opportunity to continue with their schooling to Year 12 if they wish. Although they feel they are managing at "school alright they are not too sure if they're going to be enough academics" to go to university. They would like them to stay in the country. If they went on to tertiary study they would want them to learn something like land conservation or property management which could be used in the country. Mr Cameron doesn't want them to go anywhere except an agricultural college, so he would like to encourage them into tropical agriculture. He has a sense that it is important for them to get some form of tertiary qualifications. "It's pretty hard these days for a kid to start from ground level because it's, the ground level's not there any more", he said. Whereas Mrs Cameron would be quite happy if the children were to work locally. "Peta and Michelle talk about staying on as a ringer," she said, "but I guess later in life, it might change. I'd like to see them stay". There is some

ambivalence about the Camerons' ambitions for their children. They would like them to stay in the Kimberley, but they are anxious about the future of the cattle industry and realise it is may be difficult for children who do not have tertiary qualifications. Added to these concerns, they do not know whether their children are sufficiently academically oriented to be interested in tertiary study. The Camerons are dedicated to the welfare of their children, but they are tentative about what the future holds for them.

Family Literacy Practices

Reading

The family does not have much time available for reading. Mr Cameron enjoys reading and has been an avid reader when time allowed. These days, however, he usually goes to sleep very early as he has to get up at 3.00 AM. The generator goes off at 8.30 PM so there is not much time left for reading. When he gets time he reads non-fiction, mainly about Australia or autobiographies about Australians. Mrs Cameron doesn't read:

> No, I don't read. I only read a magazine now and again. I don't read a book very often. Well I don't know if I have since I left school.

When Mr Cameron is home he usually reads to the two younger children. When he is not at home Mrs Cameron reads to the children at least three times a week. The children are encouraged to read when they go to bed each night at 7 PM. Mrs Cameron has bought many children's books, about one hundred, which they read each night. Peta will only read books about horses. The children get sent library books from the school library but Peta said, "I have never been to a public library".

Writing

Mrs Cameron tends to phone her parents rather than write to them these days. She still regularly writes to her grandparents and makes sure that the children do the same. The children write to their friends, Mrs Cameron said, because "I don't let them ring up. It costs too much". Peta keeps a journal which she writes in when she remembers. Mr Cameron has his own personal office where he does all of his own salaries and accounts. In order to keep up with all of this work he needs to spend about one day a week in his office.

Television and Computers

Television can only be watched when the generator is turned on, that is from midday to 8-30 PM. Mr Cameron likes to watch the midday news if he is at home. Other than the news he only watches sports or the occasional movie. Mrs Cameron watches *The Midday Show* and *Blue Heelers*, while the children watch *Neighbours, Home and Away, Sesame Street* and *Playschool* as well as documentaries about wild life. The children are not permitted to watch any

violent programs which sometimes annoys Peta. She has discussed this issue with her parents. If Mrs Cameron is not at home to watch television, Peta often tells her mother about her favourite television programs The family sometimes hire videos when they go to the nearest small township or the children watch one of the home videos they have purchased.

The school has provided the family with a computer and a modem so that Peta can do her school work on the computer and send it straight to her teacher in Perth. For some time she could not use it because the telephone outlet was not in an appropriate position. Now they have moved the telephone outlet so that Peta can use the modem. However, she still does not make regular use of the modem because it cannot be used in the schoolroom and she won't work on it without the help of her governess. As well it cannot be used until midday when the generator is turned on, and by that time the school day is usually over. The younger children appear to be more confident on the computer and often use it to play educational games.

Doing Distance Education

The Camerons have recently built a custom made classroom in a building about 30 meters from the main homestead. It is a bright and cheerful room with colourful curtains and a polished wooden floor. In many ways it is a smaller version of regular classrooms. Each child has a school desk and chair strategically placed in the room. There is a bench with shelves below on each side of the room. The children's materials are neatly organised on these shelves. On the walls there are charts similar to those found in schools, such as:
What to do if I don't know a word, My Writing Checklist, Numbers up to 20, Plurals Chart, Contractions, Phonics Charts and a Reward Chart with stars for good work.

Posted around the room are letters from their distance education teacher in Perth. School begins at 6-30 AM when the children go out to physical education, then they begin formal lessons at 7 AM. They work through until "smoko" at 9-30 AM when they go over to the house for morning tea. At 10 AM school is resumed until 12 midday when they usually finish, although sometimes Peta has to work on to 1 PM. The family prefer to work this way because the children don't have to work through the heat of the day and if necessary can help out with the cattle in the afternoon or go riding. As Mrs Cameron said:

> I believe in break time from twelve until half past two. You've got to have a bit of a siesta in this country. Not so bad at this time of the year but in a few week's time it starts getting damn hot. Their concentration is a mess, you know, the teacher's got Buckley's chance of getting one hundred percent out of them, you know.

There is a large tape recorder, radio, dictionaries and an encyclopedia available for the children. There is no television or computer in the schoolroom. Helga,

the governess, has her own private quarters next to the classroom, which provides bathroom facilities for the children while they are in class. Helga has a university degree but is an untrained teacher. Nevertheless, she has learnt many of the strategies of primary teachers.

Management

Mr and Mrs Cameron are satisfied with the distance education program, although they have had some difficulties with receiving the language materials in time since the change over from the old to the new language program. Mrs Cameron found the new program to be particularly difficult for Dwyer because he began learning to read on the old system and then had to move to the new one. Michelle has managed the new system extremely well, she thought, mainly through the efficiency of Helga with the management of the material. When the new materials first arrived, Mrs Cameron had been confused by some of the changes in terminology about the organisation of the sets. Mrs Cameron feels it is important for the mothers to understand the materials even when they have a governess:

> The thing is, if your governess goes tomorrow you have to step straight in and if you're not up there keeping up with all the records and everything of what's going on, what they want from you, you can't step in and take over. It's a major operation to read through all the materials.

Sometimes Mr and Mrs Cameron feel there could be more effective liaison with the teachers, such as a regular weekly telephone call to see how they are going. The children rarely call their teachers because if there is a problem Helga usually rings to resolve it. Mrs Cameron has tried teaching the children herself but found there were too many interruptions which really interfered with the children's work:

> I enjoyed teaching. I really loved it, but it's just too hard with trying to help her out here when everyone's knocking on the door and the phone and that. I find it really interrupts the kids, just sets them right out, and then when I do get a governess, it takes a good month for them to settle right down and get back in the swing, so that's why I always try and have a governess because I've just found it's too hard for them more than myself, they get right out of...

The family find it difficult to get a governess who fits in well with the family and when they do find someone suitable she rarely stays longer than 12 months. Helga enjoys station life and has made herself very much part of the family. Peta is very fond of Helga. However, she easily gets frustrated with her school work so when she loses her temper she goes over to the house until she has calmed down:

> Sometimes Peta will argue a bit and I'll like, so she'll come over here because she thinks Helga is not helping her, so we'll discuss it and then she feels better because, you know, but it's exactly the same thing so yeah, you know, if it's hard and that I'll always give a hand.

There is a certain amount of anxiety about the children's progress, as Mrs Cameron is not sure whether or not they are up to standard for their ages. She keeps in touch with other families whose children are studying by distance education in an effort to make comparisons between their children and her own. Some of this anxiety is evident in the following conversation:

> MR CAMERON: Actually, they were here the other day, what did they say about the kids. They said they're going good didn't they?
>
> MRS CAMERON: They did a spelling test on them. Michelle's in the Year Three, Dwyer is in, he's at seven and half level which is eight, so I guess he's at Grade Two and a half.
>
> MR CAMERON: He's just a fraction down.
>
> MRS CAMERON: Six months behind I think he is.
>
> INT: But Michelle's really in Year Two isn't she, and Dwyer's really in Year Three? Right.
>
> MRS CAMERON: Mmm. And Peta, I think they said she was half, oh now, I think, that she's about four months behind but she's going to wait till she heard from you. But she's told me not to worry about it all.

School Practices

School is an integral part of life at Coronation Springs. According to Mrs Cameron, "school's got to come first. That's why I have a governess". Mrs Cameron believes a routine is very important "as long as they're showing dedication that's all I want. If they're showing that dedication to whatever they're doing, whatever they do is got to be done properly. You know, I hate things half hearted". Mr and Mrs Cameron have constructed school as something that must get done. Although Peta obviously finds school work tedious she makes no effort to avoid going to school. She approaches it much like an endurance test, drifting in and out of concentration at different times of the morning.

The school day begins with physical education. Peta engaged in this with glee, as she is obviously very good at sports. When the children moved into the classroom they all participated in the finger exercises done in many Year 1 classes. Peta enjoyed these activities and joined in with the same enthusiasm as the younger children: The following transcript shows the children participating in this part of the morning's activities:

HELGA:	Okay, (*singing with children*) Where is, where is index, where is index, here I am, here I am, how are you this morning, very well I thank you, run away, run away. Good morning everyone, hold your hands, a (inaudible) little finger. What's its name, Michelle, do you know?
MICHELLE:	I know the last one.
HELGA:	Well what's the last one?
DWYER:	Little pinkie.
MICHELLE:	Yeah, pinkie.
DWYER:	Yeah, pinkie.
HELGA:	I don't know what this one is. What do you call him?
MICHELLE:	We could call it um...
HELGA:	We'll make up a name for it. (inaudible)
MICHELLE:	I know his name is, where is nobody, where is nobody.
HELGA:	No darling, we won't go into that. (*singing*) Here I am
MICHELLE:	Helga, I can't hold mine up.

The younger children demand a great deal of attention. Dwyer is very dependent on Helga, Michelle is more focussed on her work, although she still needs a lot of assistance because she is in Year 2 and is not yet a fluent reader. Peta is expected to work more independently but is not yet able to do this. She is still quite dependent on Helga and makes few attempts to resolve her own problems. She repeatedly requests attention in a polite yet demanding manner. On other occasions she uses diversionary tactics such as "Helga my pencil's not working right" or "Helga, I can't do it with my ruler because it's too hard to get my ruler in there". This dependent behaviour may be contrasted with her fiercely independent behaviour outside the classroom. During smoko she noticed that Dwyer's bike wheels were not working properly so she ordered him to take the bike to the blacksmith shop where she proceeded to repair the bike with enormous confidence.

Peta appears to resent the amount of attention the younger children receive and watches their actions very closely in order to point out misbehaviour. Sometimes she requests help because she really needs it, while on other occasions she does so merely to draw Helga's attention away from the younger children. Helga is kept on the run all of the time, the following example provides some sense of the action in the classroom:

HELGA:	Dwyer, have you read that please? I asked you to read it.
DWYER:	Mmm. (inaudible)
PETA:	Dwyer, don't kick your feet.

HELGA:	What have you read?
PETA:	Helga, can you help me please?
HELGA:	Wait a sec, I'm busy at the moment.
PETA:	Oh, please now.
DWYER:	(inaudible) the sum to the twelve...
HELGA:	What rules do they mean? These words right. Now use some of the words.
DWYER:	To use the second...
HELGA:	No, begins the, what are those things.

Spelling

At one time during the morning, Peta became rather bored with her maths, so she asked Helga if she could do Dwyer's spelling with him. Helga decided to allow this and then continued the spelling test. The children did their spelling in their spelling pad. Helga called out the words and then put each word in a sentence, when the list was completed she got the children to spell the words and mark their own work. She gave positive feed-back such as, "got all the letters but the wrong sound" when Dwyer had spelt *ride* as *righd*. The following discussion shows how the spelling lesson was framed:

MICHELLE:	Is Dwyer doing his Week Two ones, Helga? Oh I haven't been doing all these things.
HELGA:	No, it's only just starting now.
PETA:	Can I do it with him?
HELGA:	They're very easy words but yes, you get out your spelling pad. Okay, the first words 'been'. I have been to town and now I am back. Been. Okay after been is 'house'. Come over to my house and you can stay. The next's one's 'told'. I am told that you are not a (inaudible), told. Okay word three, were you here yesterday, 'these'. These are my brand new socks.
DWYER	(inaudible)
PETA:	I was just about to write these are my brand new socks.
HELGA:	Okay, 'bike'. Michelle has a new bike and she has got to ride it around the verandah and that makes a noise and ringing the bell.
DWYER	(inaudible)
HELGA:	Come and write 'bike' please Dwyer.
DWYER:	B.
HELGA:	Ride. Always ride on the left side of the road on the bike. Ride. Okay here's a compound word for you. 'Footpath.' Keep your foot on the footpath.

(inaudible) The last word is 'helmet.' Keep your helmet on your head. You put me off a bit. Okay what have you got Dwyer?

DWYER: (*spelling the word aloud*) B E E N.

Maths

Peta does maths before smoko and English afterwards. She completes other subjects when she gets her maths and English finished early or on the "catch up" day each fortnight. Helga is mainly concerned that Peta keeps up with her maths and English, and doesn't worry too much if she doesn't get her other subjects completed. She has discovered that "you can't push Peta, you have to let her work at her own pace and wait for her to ask". In the following example Peta gets frustrated because Helga goes too fast for her. Helga continues undaunted, and Peta works out where she is up to:

HELGA: (inaudible) with bold it makes it darker. (inaudible conversation 43 secs) I'll call them out and you mark them with a tick. Looks like you got most of them right. Let's see. Okay 18, 63, 126, 27, 90, 51, ...

PETA: 51

HELGA: Yeah, triple, seventeen times three, seven threes are twenty one, carry the two, seven ones are seven, eight ...

PETA: Hang on, hang on, you're confusing me.

HELGA: Okay

PETA: Don't tell me the answer.

PETA: What one's the answer?

HELGA: 51

PETA: That right?

HELGA: 36, 150, 180. (inaudible) Okay seven.

Peta enjoys doing simple calculations but gets easily confused if the examples are not similar to one another. She told me, "I like social studies, health, science and maths is best" because she enjoys "fractions and times and adding and all that sort of stuff". Maths and science are perceived as fun. "It is fun doing them," she said. "I'm good at them, they're easy to do and also they're fun". Being "easy" and "fun" are important factors in Peta's perception of what is worth doing. When she began her maths for the day she started with some simple calculations on which she concentrated hard and worked systematically. Then she began a new task in which the reading requirements were quite challenging for her. She began an activity about tessellations. The text read:

ACTIVITY FOUR: Tessellations

A tessellation is made by fitting shapes together so there are no gaps and no overlaps.
Study the patterns below. Loop the ones that show a tessellation.

Peta looked at the text for a while and then asked for help because she couldn't pronounce the word tessellation. Helga began to help her with the concept of tessellation, but then realised that Peta was having trouble reading the text, so she helped her with the pronunciation and gave her a similar word pattern to help her remember it. She then encouraged Peta to understand the concept from the examples in the book. At first Peta had trouble with the meaning of overlaps but with some help she worked this out from the diagrams. Helga attempted to construct a practice of "trying things out". The features described above can be noted in the following exchange:

PETA:	Helga, can you please help me?
HELGA:	Mmhmm. Good okay, this is the one you're having trouble with? Can you read it? Well do you know what they are?
PETA:	(inaudible)
HELGA:	It's tessellation. Tess e lation.
PETA:	Tessellation.
HELGA:	Like that that thing that we made at (inaudible).
PETA:	Shape in a (inaudible).
HELGA:	Tessellation
PETA:	Tessellation
HELGA:	Hmm, it's like , it sounds like a tassel but it's tessel ation, okay so there are no, we'll underline it, highlight it, highlight it .
PETA:	(inaudible)
HELGA:	(inaudible) wants you to highlight it, the .
PETA:	Probably then (inaudible) that middle marker. You know that one?
HELGA:	Yes we'll put it on that one. Okay so tessellation is when there are no gaps and no overlays, you can fit shapes together. Okay, are there any gaps or overlaps in these squares?
PETA:	No
HELGA:	Right, so now you have to...
PETA:	What do they mean, overlaps?
HELGA:	Well, when we get to one they do then you'll be able to tell, you'll see what they mean.
PETA:	There isn't any.
HELGA:	No. Any gaps or overlaps.
PETA:	(inaudible)
HELGA:	Not really, not yet. Last one.

PETA: Yes.

HELGA: Yeah, that's what they mean by overlap.

Peta completed the first tessellation exercise and then had another problem with reading the text. Helga helped her with the pronunciation and clarified the meaning of parallel for her:

PETA: It's (inaudible) triangles or, what's that word?

HELGA: Parallelograms. Do you know what parallel means? The pencil and the pen are parallel, now all three are parallel. They're going the same way. Are they parallel?

PETA: No but they're going the same way.

HELGA: Okay, they'd be parallel if you put them like that or like that. They can be parallel.

PETA: Yeah but this wasn't parallel.

HELGA: No, yes it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter as long as the sides are going the same way. Okay (inaudible) parallelogram in five, go the same way. You've done it before anyway.

PETA: Mmm, Open.

HELGA: Open.

PETA: Open, yeah that's what I said open.

Helga explained the next task in which the students were asked to make their own tessellation pattern using the following directions:

> Cut a section from one side of the parallelogram and add it to the opposite side.
> The section you take out and add on can be any interesting shape.
> Do the same with the other pair of sides.
> Use sticky tape to stick the pieces together
> Use your new shape as a stencil and trace it as many times as possible onto the grid paper so there are no gaps and no overlaps.

Peta began the activity with enthusiasm. It entailed some cutting out, which offered her a welcome change of activity. The task was actually more difficult than it first appeared to be. In order to attain the required outcome, it needed a thorough understanding of the task as well as accurate cutting and pasting skills. When Helga attempted to explain the problem to Peta she became upset, so Helga tried to show her how to complete the task without worrying any further about her understanding of it. Peta still seemed to be struggling with the notion of a parallelogram, but Helga decided not to push any further and said, "just cut it as big as the other one was. Yep. Okay". The following discussion demonstrates the problem Peta had with this activity:

HELGA: With these parallelograms I think when you take off one side it has to be exactly from one end to the other so that it fits exactly.

PETA: That's what I was trying to tell you.

HELGA: Yeah.

PETA: You kept saying no.

HELGA: I know, but I wasn't sure, but you wanted to cut it from right up here, that's why I wasn't sure.

PETA: No I wanted to cut it from here.

HELGA: Oh I didn't understand what you were saying. Okay, well, how big, oh it doesn't matter if it's bigger than it was.

PETA: (pause 46 secs) Helga, does this look like a parallelogram?

HELGA: (inaudible) with that side okay? (inaudible) a parallelogram? (inaudible) when you're cutting it off. Just cut it as big as the other one was. Yep. Okay. There's that. Dwyer are you done? What are you doing? Come on Dwyer, don't be (inaudible) What comes at the beginning of a sentence?

The problems Peta had with reading her maths book seemed to make it difficult for her to complete the task successfully. Her impatience to get the task finished and to get the "right" answer mitigates against her spending the necessary time to fully understand the mathematical processes in which she is engaged. Later in the morning she again made a reading error when she mis-read "triangle" for "rectangle". Again, this made it difficult to for her to solve a problem about fractions, in which she was expected to understand that 3/5 of a rectangle had been shaded in. She appeared to have difficulty understanding the language as well as the maths processes of converting fractions into decimal equivalents. In the next example, notice how Peta had difficulty in understanding how 3/5 expressed diagrammatically is the same as 6/10 which equates with the decimal 0.6. By this time, Helga had started to feel a little worn out and she became slightly confused as she explained the example to her. Peta was angered by her struggle to understand her maths because she feels it should be "easy" and she likes to get things right. Notice how these issues are evident in the following dialogue:

HELGA: That's right, but if that's the same as the three fifths because, yeah, how they did it is confusing. Okay, because I'm going to show you now. (Your teacher) won't mind. Okay here is one fifth, two fifths, three fifths, three fifths, four fifths, five fifths, that's what they've done. They've done one of these as one.

PETA: Well, why do they have them stupid lines there?

HELGA: Because they want you to see that three fifths is the same as how many tenths? You haven't got the answer right. Three fifths is the same as, how many tenths have they coloured in?

PETA: Six?

HELGA: Yeah. They're just trying to show you like, look at this, there you go, a different thing on here that three fifths is the (inaudible). There you go, one, two, three fifths should be the same as five tenths. One, two, three. How do you work that out?

PETA: Well.

HELGA: Very strange indeed. That should be five. Oh that's okay. Okay so three fifths can be expressed as the decimal, what's six over ten. If you've got six tenths, you've got zero point....

The conversation continued for some time but Helga was unable to explain the example to Peta's satisfaction. So she said they would ring her teacher in Perth that afternoon. This upset Peta even further because she evidently did not enjoy having to admit that she could not understand something. Despite the difficulty Peta had with her maths, she showed perseverance which helped maintain her interest through the struggle of the morning maths. Her ability to sustain interest in the face of such difficulty could well be related to her own perception of "maths being her best subject because you do things and it is interesting". The way school has been constructed by the family as something that "gets done" also helps to keep Peta at her work. Helga struggles to maintain a balance between pushing Peta too hard and helping her to complete her activities successfully.

English

Peta is a highly autonomous and successful learner in her life outside the classroom. This has given her a good self-concept, which on one hand helps to sustain her when she is faced with difficulties in school but on the other hand makes her resentful of her inability to cope with some school activities. She would like to be perceived as a "good" student. Despite the difficulties she had shown in reading her maths text, she described herself as a "good reader and writer". Although she did not explicitly tell me that she found English difficult, I noticed it was left out of the subjects which she perceived as "being fun and easy". When she began her English for the morning it soon became clear that she was very dependent on support to help deal with any activities which went beyond a literal interpretation of the text. When Peta began her English by flicking through her text *Grans and Gramps,* she noticed some children's writing in one of the lessons later in the book. So she spent some time reading through these examples. She then turned back to the activity she was up to. The exercise required her to read a paragraph from the story for the day in which there were a number of rhetorical questions. She was asked to note this device and to think about the way this offered the reader several

interpretations of the text. She was then asked to complete the following exercise:

> Write the sentences below and then after each one write one or two questions that would make the reader think.
> 1. The old man staggered across the desert.
> 2. It is Grandma's birthday next Saturday.
> 3. He wondered where the old man was going.

Peta began the exercise without re-reading the story and cursorily skimmed over the introduction to the task before going straight to the activity she was asked to complete. When she began the exercise she did not understand the task because of the lack of attention to the explanation of how to do it. She watched the other children for a while and then asked Helga for help without making any effort to re-read the explanation. Without any discussion of the task Helga tried to provide assistance quickly by giving her clues about what words can be used to start off the questions. She provided a number of models like, "How old was he? Who was he seeing? and What was he wearing?" After some resistance from Peta she eventually picked up the model given by Helga, although there was no connection made to the purpose of the task. However, the scaffolding provided by Helga allowed Peta to complete the task without it becoming too difficult. Helga continued the conversation with Peta for around three minutes. In the following discussion, the above mentioned features can be noted:

PETA:	No, this is Number Two.
HELGA:	Okay, he wondered where the old man was going? What? Okay, start one with what. What? Who? Perhaps you could go, Who was he. What did I have?
PETA:	Do you know you're getting tape recorded? Everybody gets taped?
HELGA:	Okay. Okay, these are all startings of sentences. Who, can you think of another one? I can. Who, what, when, where, and why. Okay. So pick one of those ones, say, or even had. Had he gone far? That was a good one. How old is he? How old was he? Which. Oh which is a good one too.
PETA:	I'm going to have that it was a good (inaudible) that one. I just put Grandma because she didn't have a tooth (inaudible).
HELGA:	Oh very, that was a good one.
PETA:	Then (inaudible).
HELGA:	You wondered where the old man was going? Who? Okay I'll do a who one. Okay. You do a what one. Alright? You wondered where the old man was going? Who was he seeing? Okay, do a what one. What?

PETA:	What, what, what, what I don't know.
HELGA:	Was his name?
PETA:	But how do you, how do you..?
HELGA:	Why not? What was his name? Okay, what was he wearing? What was he going to do when he got there? Okay. Alright. Yes, perhaps, see, there you go? Good. Alright. Try one with where. Oh no you've got where. You wondered where the old man was going. When. Do when.
MICHELLE:	I got two, Helga.

Peta worked slowly through this exercise and then began the next activity. She skipped over the extra reading task and moved straight to the next exercise once again missing out the explanation which provided the background information about the activity. There was quite a lengthy piece of text preceding the activity which discussed the way growing old can be very lonely and how this is often overcome by cultures in which people live in extended families. The students were then asked to complete the following activity:

Think About - Write About
Write answers to these questions:

1. Who is in your family?
2. Is your family nuclear or extended?
3. What are some advantages of a nuclear family?
4. What are some advantages of an extended family?
5. If you had the choice would you prefer to live in a nuclear or an extended family?

Peta started on this exercise but became a little confused. She wanted to include her uncle and Helga in her family and thus make her family an extended family but could not work out whether or not this was really an extended family because her uncle did not live in their home. She failed to note the section in the explanation which showed that an extended family can be one which "think of themselves as one family and are seen as such by other people". Once again Helga was called on for assistance, but in this instance Peta appeared to be genuinely interested in the topic as she is very fond of her uncle and grandparents. Realising that it was going to take some time to clarify the issue Helga sent the other two children off to do a task outside and then held a prolonged discussion with Peta, the transcript of which runs over 13 pages. During this dialogue Helga managed to help Peta decide that her family really is an extended family although she herself is not part of the family because she is an employee. They then moved on to the advantages and disadvantages of nuclear families. Peta found this task very difficult, so after some discussion Helga suggested they make a chart of the advantages and disadvantages which could be used by Peta to write her answer to the fifth question on the computer.

In order to keep the momentum going and prevent Peta becoming frustrated Helga took over the task of writing up the chart. At first the two of them struggled to find any advantages for living in a nuclear family:

HELGA: Okay, so what's good about having the mum and the kids, I mean, parents and kids living together without having any uncles, aunties?

PETA: Good is that, I'm lost.

HELGA: Yeah, I'm lost for ideas too. Can you think of something bad or something that's not as good as if you had a larger family? Why is it good when you've got Des here, or your Nanna and Pop come and visit? Wait a minute, that's (inaudible) yeah, that's all.

PETA: I don't know.

HELGA: Oh, I hate these tricky ones where they give ones where you have to think a lot.(*laughs)*

After some further discussion Helga suggested they re-read the explanation and this got them started as they realised that an advantage for one side of the argument can be a disadvantage for the other side. They decided that extended families "don't get lonely" whereas in a nuclear family people may be lonely. In the following exchange notice how Helga re-read the text with Peta and confirmed the information about advantages and disadvantages:

HELGA: Yes, well it might be a good idea to read it again because in here they say, some, they did give a reason why one of them's good or bad. Okay. 'In today's story the old man appears to be alone in life, having no family or friends. Growing old can be a lonely experience if you live alone or if your children and grandchildren are far away and don't visit very often. In many countries this problem is overcome by people living in extended families.' So what's the good thing about extended families? You don't.

PETA: You don't get lonely.

HELGA: Okay, we've got one. So it's extended family advantages, what was it again?

PETA: You don't get lonely.

HELGA: Okay alright, keep on going. 'An extended family' oh well, does that mean that that is a disadvantage of a nuclear family? You get lonely.

PETA: Yep.

HELGA: Right, see there you go, if you have an advantage for one of them, it becomes a disadvantage for the other one.

The two of them pressed on discussing the issue of "being spoilt" and "problems with mothers-in-law" and whether or not people in extended families would be likely to argue more often. At one point Helga asked Peta to help her spell arguing and thus reinforced a spelling rule:

HELGA:	Arguing. How do write arguing, Peta?
PETA:	I don't know. You know.
HELGA:	Ah, now, I don't think the E goes...
PETA:	Helga...
HELGA:	E goes away when ING comes to stay but is it in arguing? I'm not sure.
PETA:	Helga doesn't know.
HELGA:	Well you tell me then, Peta.
PETA:	I'm younger.
HELGA:	Well, I reckon E goes away when ING come to stay so it really should go away, shouldn't it?
PETA:	Should do, but I don't know exactly.
HELGA:	Well, I, we'll check anyway. How's Dwyer, yes Dwyer.

The dialogue continued and eventually Peta started to understand how to construct an argument for and against an issue. Helga was pleased with the progress they made:

> Mmm, finally we're on a roll. 'You don't get to know your grandparents.' So, can we have 'Kids don't get spoiled' as an advantage in the nuclear. Because what happens if you spoil someone too much?

Finally Helga was able to demonstrate to Peta how she had developed more arguments for living in an extended family, so she now had sufficient information to answer the last question in the exercise. Although Peta enjoyed working out the answer to the questions she was still loath to write anything and attempted to persuade Helga to do the writing for her. In the following transcript we see how Helga revised the information and reformulated it to show Peta how to complete the task:

HELGA:	We've got two advantages of a extended. Oh, what's a disadvantage of a extended. Lots of people. Oh, so we did have one. You've got to argue more. Anything else that wouldn't be as good as if you had a big family. Anything you can think of?
PETA:	Doesn't that start with an, start it with an R?
HELGA:	Argue? AR for CAR. AR, yeah. So if you had a choice which would you prefer to live? In a nuclear family or an extended family?

PETA: Extended.

HELGA: Yeah, you got more advantages for that. You've got lots of disadvantages for that one. Okay, no worries.

Peta is still a very dependent learner when she is doing English. She rarely reads any of the text except the instructions for completing the exercises to be sent to the teacher. If she receives enough help she will go back and re-read some of the relevant text, especially if her interest can be engaged. However, because she likes things to be "fun and easy", she needs considerable coaching to enable her to deal with some of the interpretative and critical practices used by effective English students.

Conclusion

Peta is a student with enormous self confidence outside the classroom. She does not find doing school work easy but her positive self concept helps sustain her through some of the difficulties that confront her. In order to complete her work satisfactorily, she is still very dependent on the help of the home tutor. Her success at horse riding has made her rather competitive, so she does not like to be made to look incompetent and she finds it difficult to struggle with problems which do not allow her immediate success. What counts for Peta is "getting things done" to the satisfaction of Helga in order to give the impression that she is being successful. She completes activities independently only if they require literal interpretation of the text and are "easy and fun". Helga, who has established a close relationship with Peta, continually wrestles with the dilemma of assisting Peta without pushing her beyond her frustration level.

CHAPTER 11
CASE STUDY 5: JAMES CAMISA

Helen House

Macedon is a mining town in the central west of Western Australia. Historically, the area has been of importance to the gold industry and to the mining of precious gems. In recent times, some of the old mines sites have been reopened as modern mining techniques now make it economic to work these mines. James and his family are prospectors and they use Macedon as their base. Their home is an unlined, galvanised iron house, furnished simply. There are comfortable lounge chairs on one end of the front verandah and James's bedroom is at the other end. Shade cloth surrounds part of the area, including James's bedroom, to offer some protection from the heat. The temperature in this area during summer would be over 40 degrees Celsius. The family have a lease, "the block" at Forbes, not far from Macedon. This is a permanent camp, with a tent and annexe. The family have recently been out there prospecting for a couple of months. Very near to this lease a European company has reopened the Forbes emerald mine. There is quite a community of prospecting families operating in the area at certain times of the year. As well as working the lease, the Camisas travel many hundreds of kilometres, to the most remote areas in the state, prospecting, usually for three or four days at a time. The family take their supplies and enjoy some "bush tucker" on these trips.

Mr and Mrs Camisa have three children and two grandchildren. They have two daughters living in Perth, Angela (19) and Domenica (21). Domenica has two young children. The Camisa's third child is James, aged 14. He is studying at Year 9 level through the Distance Education Centre in Perth

Mr Camisa does not have positive memories of his formal education. He came to Australia, from Italy, when he was 12 years old. He did "very well at school in Italy, but when he came to Sydney and went to school, there were difficulties. The school put him in a class with a Maltese boy, hoping he would learn to speak English". As Mrs Camisa explained, "12 or 13 he was put into Grade 3 because of his language. He has often said to me "I got the cane in Sydney and I really do not know what for". He ended up not going to school because he found it "really hard". Mr Camisa rarely speaks Italian. Mostly the family conversations are in English. Mr Camisa is a chef by trade and he has worked in the food industry for many years.

Mrs Camisa finished her formal education in England at the equivalent of Year 10. She describes herself as "a jack of all trades". She has been a restaurateur, waitress, upholsterer, student of Indonesian and now she is a prospector. Both

of the Camisas' daughters went through to Year 12 and also to TAFE. Angela is a clerical assistant and Domenica is an accountant and mother. Both the girls were interested in education and did well at school. Mrs Camisa regrets that they did not have the opportunity to work with distance education as their school days may have been happier.

The Camisas also include in their family the mine manager at the Forbes emerald mine, Brett. He is "a great family friend". He is very interested in James's education and he shares much of his knowledge on prospecting and mining with James and his parents.

Mr and Mrs Camisa began prospecting out in the goldfields when James was a baby. However, for the past for ten years they have been based in Perth so that the children would have access to educational institutions. "It's just this last two years that we have been coming up here, see I was only coming on school holidays," she said. The family decided that James should be educated by distance education after a discussion with a prospecting friend. She advised the Camisas that this type of education would allow them to pursue their prospecting interests, full time, and not be tied to a particular time, area or school. Mr and Mrs Camisa are very pleased that they can now focus their energies on prospecting.

James is a quietly spoken young man and on first meeting appears shy. He is not keen on using the telephone or the tape recorder. He enjoys playing music and "mucking around" in his leisure time. He goes prospecting and indicates that his main job is "filling up the holes". He has found some gold and "put it away" but his main interest is gem stones. James is very good at sport and played a lot at his old school. He enjoys playing football and basketball although has not had much opportunity to play since moving to Macedon. There is a basketball court in Macedon and he is able to shoot for goals but "there is nobody his age to play with".

Learning Environment

In Macedon, James does his lessons in the lounge room or on the front verandah of the house. In the lounge room there is a table and on the verandah a small desk between the arm chairs. This verandah area is partly surrounded by shade cloth and faces on to one of the main streets of Macedon. Mrs Camisa indicates that James does not do his best work at Macedon as there are too many distractions. She will be pleased when they return to the "block" at Forbes so they can be more focused on the lessons. James is behind in his lessons as Mrs Camisa has been away in Perth with Domenica. He has quite a lot of work to do to "catch up".

At the "block" there is an area set up for James's school work. The table on which he works is in a shade cloth room, built by Mrs Camisa, off a plastic caravan annexe. Mrs Camisa indicates that he has a more organised working area at Forbes. James does his school work in the morning and in the afternoon sometimes he works at the Forbes emerald mine. At present, his job is to pick up the sticks off the air field and he enjoys watching the planes landing. The

men at the mine have taken a great interest in James and teach him about the various machines that are used in the mine. "The men at the mine treat him like a man," Mrs Camisa explained. The Camisas have taught James to drive and encourage him to do so at Forbes. As they spend a lot of time in remote areas, it is essential "in an emergency" that James would be able to drive.

Aspirations For The Children

Mrs Camisa wants her children to be happy. The girls appear to be settled and looking to their career paths. Mrs Camisa suggests that James might cook and become "a third generation chef". Although James does enjoy cooking he does not show much interest in taking it up as a profession at the moment, as Mrs Camisa explained:

> I've tried to steer James onto different things but its up to him. It depends on what he wants to do. I can't see the point of pushing if it's not there. You can encourage.

Mrs Camisa did not know whether James would make the bush his home. He "enjoys the lifestyle out in the bush. Not so much when we are stuck in town".

Contact With The School

Mrs Camisa has the most contact with the school, as James finds it difficult to talk to the teachers over the phone. The area co-ordinator is the teacher that Mrs Camisa speaks to most often. He is also James's maths teacher. When James and Mrs Camisa were last in Perth they visited Leederville "to get James to meet all his teachers, which was great, because when you talk to them on the phone, at least you can put a face". Mrs Camisa is impressed with the relationship that develops between student, home tutor and teachers at the school.

> They've got time to be with you. Nothing's too much trouble. You know with any problems you can phone them up and it does get worked out. I felt a bit, with James's maths we were doing was way way above me and I had to phone the teacher up and I felt so stupid. That was the first time we were doing the distance education and she made me feel good. I was (inaudible) but I'd never done it at school let alone trying to help James. You know I just couldn't, so we dropped his maths down a few levels.

According to Mrs Camisa, James is now an "A" student with distance education and he has a positive attitude towards his work.

Family Literacy Practices

Watching TV

Although the TV is on all the time at the Camisa's Macedon home, it is only in the evening that they actually "watch" TV. Mr Camisa enjoys watching

comedy and science fiction programs. James and Mr Camisa "love *The Simpsons*". Domenica and Angela video these programs for the family and send them up to Macedon. James adds that his father likes *Married with Children, Star Trek* and *Red Beard.* Mrs Camisa will occasionally watch these family favourites with her husband and James.

James watches television from 5.00 PM to 9.00 PM each day. As well as *The Simpsons,* he enjoys *Married with Children* and *Heartbreak High.* He watches videos and tends to like action movies like *The Terminator* or comedies. When he goes to the video shop in Macedon he will look at the new releases to see if there is anything of interest. Jamès also enjoys listening to the radio.

Time Spent Together

Wherever the Camisas are, they spend a lot of time together. In Macedon, they play many games of cricket in front of the house. At Forbes, they prospect and they go "out bush" together. Earlier this year, the family spent three months together at Forbes and nearby prospecting areas. They describe themselves as a "very close knit family". Mrs Camisa says it is difficult to get very involved with community activities in Macedon because they are moving around so much. There are no children James' age in Macedon. She said "I don't think there are any kids his age there's lots of younger ones. Not so many older ones unless they're really old". James appears to mix mainly in an adult world.

Reading and Writing

Mrs Camisa indicates that "if she picks up a book she cannot put it down so she does not pick it up". She buys "the paper on Saturday and Sunday for some bad news". If she were given a book that was light hearted or a suspense book she may read it but then she would not get her work done. "I really do not get much time to read," she said. She is also very interested in studying old gold maps and doing crosswords. Mrs Camisa writes many letters to her family in England and to friends in the eastern states. She brews her own beer and she keeps records of the different brews.

James enjoys reading non fiction books, gem books and *Footrot Flats.* "I like to read sort of facts books," he explained, and "with the gem books I'm usually looking at the pictures and if I see something I read a little bit". There is a library in Macedon but James is not a member. He does not write except for his school work. The school sends up fiction books for him to read and resource books to assist with his studies. He gives the impression that reading and writing are low priority in terms of his non school activities. James had a novel to read for school and Mrs Camisa was determined that he would read it. She sat with him and he read the book aloud. Apparently "it took ages" for him to read this novel.

What Is Distance Education Like For The Family

Mrs Camisa is very happy with distance education. "The best decision the family ever made was to put James on distance education and go

prospecting". She feels the teachers view the students as individuals and they interact positively with them. James is a more confident person since he has been working with this type of education. "The one-to-one is good for him and he is getting quality time," she said. At James' last school he was "a failing student". The teachers told her he was the "class clown" and he had learning disabilities. She suspects they needed an extra student to get a special class at the school, and James was targeted as "that student".

At the beginning, Mrs Camisa found some of the distance education material "quite daunting with all the books and everything coming at once". She had not had any experience with this type of education previously. However, each time she has contacted the school, the teachers have been helpful and supportive. She now feels quite comfortable with the material. Mrs Camisa does not have problems with the educational jargon.

Mrs Camisa has been able to get a balance between lessons and her other duties:

> I've worked myself out. I've got to put the time in for James now. He's at school. I'm grateful for being up here. If I can go prospecting two hours a day it's better than not going prospecting at all. James comes first.

Mrs Camisa emphasises that it is important to be organised and have set times for school. The lessons are well set out and if you get stuck, "not that we often do", there is always the telephone. Some of the units are easier than others. The maths that James was doing was too difficult. Now he is working on "Maths for Living" and "everything in there is relevant and it's good". Science at times presents some difficulties as "the experiments that we have done have not always turned out". One lesson that was particularly successful for James was a home economics lesson. It was a lesson using a camp oven and the teacher sent up a Jack Absalom cook book with many recipes to try. Overall, Mrs Camisa indicates that distance education as a way of schooling is "definitely different from being in school in the classroom".

James does his school work in the lounge room, on the front verandah and at the family camp at Forbes. He does not have access to a computer or fax. There appears to be limited access to the phone. The family is able to receive television programs through the country communications network. James has a dictionary, some reference books from the school and a few books on minerals. His greatest resource is Mrs Camisa. He would turn to her for assistance before consulting his teachers, the text, a reference book or the dictionary.

School Practices

James does most of his work out at the "block" near Forbes because there are fewer distractions out there. He tries to do 45 minutes on each lesson during the day. "We do four major ones each morning. We try and do the options in the afternoon which we are way, way behind in", she said. The major lessons

are: English, mathematics, social studies and science. James begins at 9.00 AM and works through until about 2.00 PM in the afternoon, with tea breaks and a lunch break. For the first few months of this year the family were at Forbes, and James was able to keep to his routine. However, Mrs Camisa had to go to Perth in the middle of the year and the timetable has been interrupted. James is now behind in his units of work .

Mrs Camisa sits with James and reads through the lessons with him. She finds this beneficial as she is learning and they can discuss the questions. The social studies teacher suggested Mrs Camisa encourages James to read the questions in the text more than once. In this way he will be answering the question that has "really" been asked. Mrs Camisa tells James to read aloud so that she knows exactly what he has read. Usually after James has read a piece of work Mrs Camisa asks him what he thinks of it. She feels that reading is important. "You have got to have the basics,". she said. You have to know how to read and write and know the basics of maths or else you're lost".

James sees himself as an "average" learner and indicates his strengths are in reading and writing. When asked about speaking and listening James said "it depends on what I am talking about". There was little evidence that James enjoyed talking to adults and Mrs Camisa confirmed this. When I was interviewing James he appeared to say as little as possible and would answer with a single word. The following transcript gives an indication of the interview pattern:

INT:	When you find school work difficult, what do you usually do? Ask for help?
JAMES:	Yes.
INT:	Seems a pretty basic question doesn't it? Read your textbook? So before you said 'mum help' would you read it again or that's when mum would come and say 'well let's look at it again'?
JAMES:	Yeah.
INT:	Is that what would seem to happen? Yes, okay. Right. Do you usually know how you're going in your school work by teachers' marks and comments?
JAMES:	Yep.
INT:	So you find that? And perhaps from mum too?
JAMES:	Yep.

James knows how he is progressing in his school work from teachers' marks and comments, combined with mother's assessment.

James likes his maths units now that they have been changed to "Maths for Living". He sometimes enjoys social studies, depending on the topic. He enjoyed the topic about the rabbit proof fence, "where they put up the rabbit proof fence because the rabbits were destroying land". He indicates the

assignments are "good" for social studies and the teacher is also "good". He works on his science units spasmodically. Mrs Camisa indicates "he has a go, but tends to stop". The science teacher made the comment on James's work, "what you have done is very good but there should be more of it". James is working on a modified English program. At the time of my visit in August he was using *English Unit 3.3 Prose Fiction, Lesson Paper 1.*

James attended a school camp in early September 1994 for a week, based at Leederville Distance Education Centre. The mornings were spent in formal lessons in the school classroom and the students were taught by the various subject teachers. In the afternoons the students made visits to Scitech, the Superdrome, Fremantle Prison and the Francis Burt Law Centre.

At the camp James was looked on by the other boys, all younger, as the leader and somewhat of a role model. The teacher in charge of the camp said he was quite a character and an extrovert with the other students. In the classroom situation the boys in the group would ask James for advice and borrow materials from him.

Social Studies

I had the opportunity to observe James working on a social studies lesson at the school camp. The unit was *Australian Government Unit 3.1 Lesson Book 2, Getting into Government.* James worked on the unit for 30 minutes. First he read the general section carefully about beliefs and values. One question that he did not answer asked "What does it mean about a person's values if he or she ticks the 'no opinion' column?". James did not answer this question as the task appeared too complex.

He then looked at the section on political opinion polls. It took him quite a long time to work out the instructions with the assistance of the dictionary. He was required to answer the following questions in assessment 2.1:

> 1(a) List the three most important influences on your beliefs and opinions
>
> **Answer**: Family, Friends and School (He used the available writing space).
>
> (b) Give an example of how your beliefs or opinions have been influenced
>
> **Answer**: "Smoking. I think smoking is bad because smoking is bad for you" (He used the available writing space).
>
> 2 In the election of July 11 1987 the ALP won
>
> Now study the opinion polls in this lesson again and answer these questions.

a) Did the opinion polls predict that the ALP would win? (Yes/No 1 mark)
b) Was there any time that the Lib/Nat Party could have won the election? (Yes/No 1 mark).

James did not answer these questions as it required detailed analysis of the text and he appeared unsure as to what was required.

3 In a report of about 100 words explain why the ALP won the election. Use the information from the opinion poll below in your answer. (12 marks)

Q Which party, Liberal, or Labor, do you think...	Lib	ALP	Neither	Don't know
	%	%	%	%
Has a better leader?	22	64	8	5
Has better tax policies?	36	37	7	19
Is more competent to run the economy?	32	47	10	11
Most likely to reduce government spending?	47	29	12	11
Most likely to reduce unemployment?	25	46	17	11
Would encourage people to work harder?	46	29	14	12
keep unions and strikes under control?	34	45	14	8

James answered as follows:

The ALP won the election in 1987 Because most people thought they had a better leader. Bob Hawlk and the laberer running the economy. And most likely to reduce unemployment, also keep unions and strikes under control. The both parties has a better tax policies.

He then looked at the section on political parties and appeared to read the text word by word. He was asked to look at the organisation and to discuss the differences between the ALP and the Liberals. The lesson concluded before James worked on the assessment for this section. James appeared reluctant to ask the teacher for assistance during this lesson.

English

James did a thirty minute English class at camp with an exchange teacher from Canada and his regular English teacher, Miss White.

The Canadian teacher took a lesson on reading skills. She asked the group. "What do you read for?" The students agreed they read for pleasure and to gain information. She then told the students they were going to estimate how many words they read per minute. She asked the students to read while she timed them for a minute and then to count the number of lines to gauge the

number of words read. James worked out that he had read less than two hundred words in a minute Two of the students said they had read over four hundred and fifty words. She explained to the group that the type of reading they did for their study was the slowest type of reading. This is because they are reading for understanding, comprehension and to be able to remember the information. She then got the children to read some passages in a book and to answer some questions about the content. James did not answer any questions and looked uncomfortable that he may be asked some questions. After fifteen minutes Miss White took over the session.

Miss White took a lesson on creative writing. It would appear that creative writing is a difficult area for students on distance education. She showed the students a useful method of "getting started" on creative writing. The students were asked to imagine a beach party at night. She asked them to use all the senses to describe this situation in their writing. Miss White suggested to the students that they draw a circle with the relevant word in the middle, in this case, 'night'. She then suggested they write down all the words they associated with 'night'. James drew a circle with the word 'night' in the middle and then wrote words that he could use in the description around the outside. "Dark, stars, black cars, kids, dogs, daggers". When he had written all the words he could think of he began his description:

night

Black stary and damp cold and misty. shadows of the trees swaying in the wind and a smell like a dead animal and the wind is cooing which put shivers up my spine.

The teacher complimented James on his writing and was particularly impressed with his opening words. Miss White then asked the students to write a piece about themselves. James drew a circle with the word "me" in the centre. He then wrote words around the outside that could be used in his description "tall, big, Football, Sport, School, Foot, time, watch, whight, 14, hungrey, sleepy". Unfortunately, the lesson finished before the students had time to write. Miss White hoped this would be a useful guide for them to use with their creative writing at home. James seemed quite relieved this session was over and was looking forward to lunch and the afternoon excursion.

Conclusion

James has made some progress on distance education and it has certainly improved his perception of himself as a learner. However, he appears to be dependant on Mrs Camisa to take him through the work, step-by-step. He has limited ways of using language and this makes it difficult for him to discuss ideas. Mrs Camisa is convinced the one-to-one and positive attitude of the distance education teachers has made a big difference to James's school work.

CHAPTER 12
CASE STUDY 6: DAVID COOKE

Judith Rivalland

Mr and Mrs Cooke live in a brightly painted weatherboard and fibro house in Venture Inlet, a few hours drive from Perth. Venture Inlet is a large town with modern facilities and a range of government and private schools. There are four children in the family. Paul, the eldest, is 21 and studying his fourth year of computer technology at University. He lives in Perth but usually spends an evening or two each week at the family home. David is 14 and is studying Year 10 school work through distance education He has a serious health problem which made it very difficult for him to cope with regular schooling. Melanie (12) is in Year 7 and Tony (10) is in Year 5. Both attend a local Catholic primary school. Mr Cooke is a trained teacher with a four year qualification in music education. He has taught in a number of schools in Western Australia. He began his career teaching English, art and social studies in a remote country high school and then moved to general primary teaching. After upgrading his qualifications to a Bachelor of Music he became a music specialist, teaching in a range of country and metropolitan schools. When the teachers' union went on strike he moved to a private school where he taught for three years before beginning his own music school at Venture Inlet. Mrs Cooke was a good student who completed ten subjects for her Junior Certificate in Year 10, followed by one year of commercial studies. Her parents "weren't inclined to send a daughter on" so she went to work after completing her commercial studies course. Before marriage Mrs Cooke worked in the Public Service doing secretarial work and data processing. Since she has been married she has taken care of the family and sells some tupperware. "I'm the tupperware lady but basically I'm a mum. I'm more of a chauffeur actually". Mrs Cooke has completed a New Opportunities for Women program and would like to re-enter the work force doing clerical work in a public library because this would give her the chance to combine her public relations skills with her love of books.

The Cookes are committed to their family. "We're a fairly isolated insular family. Sort of fairly separate from the rough and tumble of the community, you know, we have our own Christian values and standards". The family attend church regularly and all of the children have participated in Scripture and confirmation classes. Family life is organised around the interests of the children. Mr Cooke has built a small theatre in the back of the house where the children frequently perform concerts, puppet shows and plays. Melanie is devoted to ballet dancing: "She has her goal set. She has her vision for the Australian Ballet. She really wants to go to the top". Melanie's dancing classes take up a lot of the family time as she studies classical, jazz, tap and theatrical

ballet, which involve attending classes three times a week. She also participates in competitions in different venues around the State. Her parents are happy to support her: "We are committed. I mean, we definitely don't mind that. We will commit ourselves to anything the kids have a vision for".

Mr Cooke and Mrs Cooke are very concerned about their children's schooling. "We have a very sensitive group of children which don't mix well with the rough and tumble of the normal school life". Mr Cooke has not been happy with the school performance of any of the younger children. He feels that long episodes of ill-health in the family may be partly responsible for some of these difficulties. Over the last seven years, Mrs Cooke has been ill and spent time in hospital, Mr Cooke required heart surgery, David has suffered from chronic fatigue and the family were involved in a serious car accident. However, he also feels that schools do not cater very well for sensitive children like David and Tony.

David began to fail at school in Year 5. Because his illness was very difficult to diagnose, it took Mr Cooke a long time to accept that David's health was a major cause of his difficulties. According to his parents, he was a very timid child without very much self confidence, so he became quite mischievous when failure set in due to his ill-health. The teachers, who generally disliked him, found him a constant source of irritation because they did not understand what was happening to him. In Year 7 he was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome. He struggled on with school for the next two years but was unable to cope with the physical and mental demands of high school. His poor organisational skills, lack of self-discipline, ill-health and difficult behaviour led to serious depression. When Mr Cooke eventually accepted David's illness, he persuaded the Education Department to allow David to study through distance education and gave up his teaching position to set up his own music school in order to tutor David at home. The progress David has made since he has been doing his schooling at home has delighted the family:

> David's not subject to all those variables of distraction at school, teacher moods, peer pressure, just all the wasted time and disorganisation in the blackboard jungle. I mean, I get quite down about the school system because I've spent so much time in it and there's so much waffle and waste of time, in administration and meetings. I'm glad I'm out of it.

Mr Cooke feels Tony is not coping well at school and shows much of the same school behaviour as David. Although Tony is not unwell, Mr Cooke is considering putting him on distance education. However, Mrs Cooke has some concerns about the social isolation of studying by distance education:

> MR COOKE: I'm very tempted to put him on Distance Education because I've seen the results with David and compared to what he did at school and the problems he was having, the results he was getting, the standard of his work and his organisational skills. I can see Paul's also

disorganised, untidy, really quite undisciplined at school, lacking concentration, showing a lot of the symptoms David had.

MRS COOKE: Undisciplined is the word.

MR COOKE: And I believe that I could do much better and get better results.

MRS COOKE: But I disagree.

INT: Right.

MR COOKE: [Mrs Cooke's] mainly concerned about the social aspect.

Aspirations

The Cooke children have been encouraged to follow their interests in the hope that their self-motivation will allow them to attain their personal goals and gain a sense of achievement. Mr and Mrs Cooke have high aspirations for all of their children. They are pleased with Paul's success at university because "he's doing exactly what he wants to do":

> Yeah, but we have encouraged it. He's really self motivated, very self motivated but we encouraged it by getting him into Dick Smith kits, and his presents were related to the electronics and so it was a natural progression that he went into electronics, as much as I wanted him to do music. He got a scholarship in music.

Mr Cooke had expected David to follow an academic career and go on to university. However, since he has been tutoring David at home, he has become much closer to him and now realises that a TAFE course would be more appropriate. David says, "I want to be a comic strip writer like Schulz". He has been given a great deal of help to research available courses and he has now decided to complete Year 11 at school and then move on to a TAFE course in the art and craft area. This decision has alleviated some of the pressure related to school performance, because David can now select fewer academic school subjects and more vocational ones. In this way he has gained confidence and become much more positive about his schooling. With the improvement in his health and his increased confidence, the family hope that David will be able to return to high school for Year 11. In order to prepare David for returning to high school, he has begun attending a few classes back at his old school. The day before I visited David he had spent a day back at school. When he greeted me at the door he told me he had been back to school for the first time on the previous day. This had "been scary and rather exhausting" but he was looking forward to being with his friends again.

Family Literacy Practices

Mrs Cooke feels talking has played a valuable role in the shaping of the family literacy practices. Promotion of literacy has occurred through the discussion of shared interests and concerns:

> Yes, most of us enjoy talking. The whole family doesn't generally go out together but it's quite a big deal to take the dog out and, you know, at least one or two of the children will come with me and, I've always sort of talked to the children. Tony in particular, he went to the local preschool which is just a couple of blocks away, not the same school he's going to, and you know, we talk all the time. He's very much into the garden and environment and that sort of thing

Reading

In the Cooke family, reading is highly valued as a personal activity which provides both entertainment and enjoyment. Mrs Cooke is an avid reader of mystery books and other forms of fiction. Her interest in reading for pleasure appears to have constructed this same view of reading amongst other family members:

MR COOKE:	Melanie's reading is a personal escape.It's really not a shared thing but she'll, she'll.
MRS COOKE:	You mean I've been escaping since I've been six or seven years old. (*laughs*)

David shares his mother's interest in reading for entertainment and pleasure:

DAVID:	If I've got a book I'll read it. If I've got a book Dad can't tear me away. Recess time, I'm always out in the sunny spot in the chair and I'm always with a book so if I don't have a book I think , 'Oh gosh what do I do.' I think 'Oh I wish I had a book'. I'm a reader. I got that off my Mum.
INT:	Yes right.
DAVID:	Mum reads all the time. She's like that as well.
INT:	So you actually spend a lot of time in your spare time reading, even at recess and things like that.
DAVID:	Yeah, recess and lunch I'll have a book and I'll have my lunch and then I'll take it to read my book again and....

David "can't live without books". He is "a massive fan of Asterix" which he describes as "graphic novels, they're not comic books. That is an insult to Asterix". He likes "the definite wit, you know, you can always find something good about each picture and just the great drawings they've done...like here they're in Rome at the Olympic Games". David gets many of his books from the local public library but he buys his Asterix books because he wants to have a complete collection of these works. In order to earn pocket money to buy his Asterix books, David tutors a Year 3 student in maths, science and English:

INT: So, what, how do you help her? Can you tell me a bit, what sort of things?

DAVID: She's very, extremely bouncy, she's, wouldn't say hyperactive but close to it and, I don't know how (inaudible). Her mother just, she just needed someone else to get the, to get her attention, and so I just sort of hold her down, and say, 'Now look this is how you do it'. If she doesn't understand a sum I go through it and I say,'Well'. Some of these sums she's been getting lately, it's got 'six plus two equals six plus what?' And I say 'Well look this is six here, and this is six here, and there's a two here so what goes here?' And she'll say 'Hmmm', and if I coach her along, after a while she'll get it. If she's grasped that idea and...

INT: And do you help her with her reading?

DAVID: Yeah.

INT: So what sort of, when you're helping with her reading, what are the sorts of things you think you have to do to help someone learn to read?

DAVID: Well basically she just goes through the reading. If she misses a word or gets a word wrong I ask her to go back and start from just before the sentence or whatever it was, and she'll, we'll just go through that, and she'll just do ten minutes of reading each day.

David has strong opinions about what reading he finds interesting and is reluctant to read anything which is not stimulating and enjoyable. He rarely reads informational or current affairs texts. He views reading as an individual and personal act which is participated in for pleasure and enjoyment. Although he is such an avid reader, his construction of reading as entertainment rather than an intellectual practice, to some extent precludes the transfer of his interest in reading to his school work. On the other hand, Mr Cooke doesn't seem to enjoy reading for pleasure like the rest of the family. He feels the reading practices of the family sometimes interfere with doing homework or the completion of other activities. He views reading as an intellectual challenge:

> I don't do a lot of reading personally apart from my, spiritual reading. I love spiritual books and get most of my, I suppose ah, what shall I say, from that and, you know, from my education, you know, anything on philosophy or thought provoking material I'll read. I read the *Sunday Times* because, you know, it's, I suppose, just a time to stop after church on Sunday, I skim through it and find an article or two and...

The family cannot afford to buy the daily newspaper, but they buy the *Sunday Times* and visit the public library each week. They have around 250 books in their personal library, many of which have been purchased at second-hand book sales. Mrs Cooke purchases a number of books through the Readers Digest Book Club and the family have a set of *World Book Encyclopedia* for which Mr Cooke is an agent.

Writing

There is a lot of writing done in the Cooke household. Mr Cooke completed his Graduate Diploma in Music Education by correspondence and prepares all of his own materials and writes his own music for his students. He does "hours of writing. I write all of my programs myself. I don't buy many books and tutorials, I do my own writing". Mr Cooke also keeps a personal journal or "regular jottings". He likes "writing records of main events", however, these are private and not usually shared with the rest of the family. Mr Cooke also helps the younger children with their homework, "so you know, that means as a teacher. I go for the marking and the spelling and the presentation and all that bit".

David's admiration of Asterix comics has led him to write cartoon strips about his favourite stuffed toy Ralph. He has begun writing a book about Ralph which he hopes might lead to a career as a cartoonist. He feels he is not a very good letter writer, although, when he first began studying by distance education, he corresponded with his school friends. Recently he has stopped writing to them because he hopes to be back at school with them very soon. He sometimes writes stories, but feels he would do this much more frequently if the family had a word processor and printer.

Television and Computers

The family have an Amstrad computer and a Sega program. Mr and Mrs Cooke do not use the computer or play computer games. There are about 8 or 9 games on the Sega and around one hundred games on the Amstrad. David enjoys playing computer games which he often does when he has finished his school work. He prefers to play by himself but often plays with Tony and Melissa even though they are not as skilled as he is at playing these games. Since he has been unwell and unable to play all of the sport which he previously enjoyed, the computer has provided him with a way of entertaining himself.

So long as David has completed all of his school work and done some exercise, he is allowed to watch television every afternoon. He prefers comedies like *Different Strokes, Hogan's Heroes* and *Full House.* His favourite program is *McGyver.* "*McGyver* is like church. I watch it no matter what, Monday night. You cannot stop me watching *McGyver*". David's interest in these programs is shared by his mother and younger brother and sister. Because Melanie is often at ballet lessons he often has to keep her up to date on what is happening in different episodes. David recognises how many television programs attempt to

convey particular values about life. He noticed how the last episode of *McGyver* focussed on the dangers of uncontrolled scientific experimentation:

> Well, last Monday's *McGyver* had a scientist, wouldn't say mad scientist, I'd just say an over excitable scientist, a scientist that didn't care how she got the information but she wanted this information to grow rice, but this information was dangerous because she'd sent just this plain mixture that was harmless up into space. She'd hidden it on this satellite and, you know, without anyone's permission because she just does things. She's sick of the red tapes, she just does things and this satellite just happens to fall and in space, it's gone bling, and you know, hundreds of miles away, (inaudible) just dropped dead, animals I mean, not plants. It turns out there's an AIDS organism and they, the sheep, sort of die, you know.

Mr Cooke does not share the family interest in comedy, so he tends to watch television later in the evening when he can watch *Foreign Correspondent*, *Attitude* and *Lateline*. He likes to watch the *ABC News* which the children usually watch as well, although, if it's boring, David may do something else. The family share Mr Cooke's interest in popular classical music such as Andrew Lloyd Webber and James Galway. The children also enjoy other modern music but they are only permitted to play this music at certain times.

Doing Distance Education

David studies in his own bedroom situated close to the family room. His father recently renovated the room in order to provide him with a more effective working environment. His room is set up with a study desk and lamp above which there is a bookcase in which all of his completed sets of work are stored and filed by Mr Cooke. *The World Book Encyclopedia* are in a bookcase next to his desk and another bookcase at the end of the bed on the other side of the room holds his personal library. Next to his bed is a chest of drawers on which he keeps his favourite toys and his current leisure reading books as well as a few of his Asterix books. There is a pin-up board above his bed on which there are photographs of his teachers, achievement awards received for his work and the school semester timetable. The far end of the room holds a large built-in wardrobe and dressing table in which he displays his completed craft work. In order to ensure that David completes as much of his school work as possible, Mr Cooke ensures that David's room is kept orderly.

Organisation

Mr Cooke believes organisation of the school program is essential. He prepares a detailed program for David each day. He writes the program in an exercise book detailing the subjects to be done in each time slot. David begins school at 8-30 AM and finishes at 3 PM. Recess and lunch times are scheduled into the program as well as any extra curricular activities or medical visits. He explains the need for this as follows:

> Really you can't expect a kid just to follow the work and just work it out without supervision, you know, and the motivation is constant, particularly with David who has had the chronic fatigue. All the time flagging, you've just got to motivate him and keep him to the task and have a very strict schedule, for security's sake.

Mr Cooke has been able to gradually decrease the amount of supervision and time he needs to spend with David as his motivation and results have improved:

INT: Right, so, how long in the day, like, do you actually do school work with him?

MR COOKE: Less and less since he started. When he first started, over twelve months ago, I sat with him and it had to be a constant 100% being there to get him to work because his mental approach was that disorganised, he didn't want to do anything, at the beginning, and then I suppose after about a term, he saw results. He saw himself getting an A. We had a monetary board where he earned so much for A and a B, and he sort of saved some money up and got himself a few treats and then he saw that he was getting success, particularly say in maths. And the workbooks helped a lot, they were so organised and straightforward and, I suppose, his aptitude at problem solving and thinking through improved and he discovered that he could do it.

INT: Right.

MR COOKE: And so I can walk out of the room and leave him to do a day's Maths without the supervision, and I would come back, yes and he'd done it. You know, that sort of thing has just evolved and ah, I think that over the twelve months that has gradually increased in other subject areas too. Things like maths, he couldn't sit down and work to. I would say some of his science, yes, the materials were there but I had to be right on to make sure that he covered the questions that he had to go through. The tutor's job is really to go through the book to make sure the work is done too, you know, definitions filled in, marking completed. There's so many little jobs that they have to do that you have to be on the ball to check, and I think doing that also assisted him in getting his A's because some of the marks are for his attitude in completing work. And if I hadn't have been so strict on checking that he'd done it all then he would have lost out on the marks and

I think he gradually saw that. It takes a long time to reorganise a boy who at school was totally disorganised.

INT: Right.

MR COOKE: His work was a mess. He couldn't file anything, you know, the skills were not there. He didn't have them at school. The system failed him at school. Well, it's not the system's fault completely because if you've got a kid who concentrates in class they'll learn, but David didn't concentrate.

INT: Right, I know, I know what you're talking about.

MR COOKE: He dreamt his way through school, you know, just flagged, slept, read and generally did not pay attention. *(laughs)*

With the support and encouragement David has been given by his father ,he is able to work fairly independently while his father continues preparing for and teaching his music students. When David has any difficulty with his work, he usually re-reads the text and if he cannot solve the problem he asks his father for assistance. David is confident that his father will be able to resolve most of his problems, so he rarely has to ring his teachers, although they sometimes ring him to check on his progress.

Management

Mr Cooke has found the materials easy to work with because they are systematic and well organised, "because I'm a very highly disciplined, organised, schedule orientated person, much to my wife's disgust"(*laughs*). He goes on to explain, "there is a student handbook for the unit curriculum, there's a setting up, there are all the materials on how to timetable". Mr Cooke feels "it's the support system for the student, which I found from experience in the classroom. If you have the schedule and the timetable, and the children know what is going to happen, then you've eliminated a lot of the distraction".

He has been delighted with the improvement in David's self esteem and the dramatic improvement in results:

> Results show that. At the school where he really struggled and then eventually giving up, he was getting C's and D's, and just simply dropping out, and he did drop out. You know, he just absolutely gave the whole system up, socially, academically, just chucked it all in. And so now with the one-to-one and the motivation that we've been giving him, he's come out with mostly A's and B's.

However, tutoring David has involved the complete rescheduling of family life which has caused some resentment amongst the other children. Mr Cooke has found it difficult to juggle the demands of the rest of the family, tutor David and deal with the loss of his own "independence and freedom". He doesn't

have time to do what he wants to do, like play the piano and practise his own music "which I want to do more than anything else but I don't do it". At times Mr and Mrs Cooke have differences of opinion about how hard David should be expected to work. Mrs Cooke is often concerned about his social development and tries to encourage David to participate in ballroom dancing, church groups and ten pin bowling in order to provide opportunities for him to socialise. Nevertheless, they feel any sacrifices have been well worthwhile in the light of the progress David has made.

David feels much more confident about his work and has found the experience of working on distance education very rewarding. However, he is beginning to miss his school friends and is getting a little bored with this mode of learning. In the following transcript David explains the process he has been through:

DAVID: Distance education is a lot easier.

INT: Is it?

DAVID: Because you don't have the pressure from the teacher breathing down your neck and yelling at you and putting you in detention. They're all the way up there and they can't do anything.

INT: But you also seem to be willing to try hard to get good marks

DAVID: Yes, I found I can do it. It's easier here so I'll just try it. I mean it's not that I slacked off at school, I tried my hardest. It was just that the work was not good. I mean, they didn't give me a chance and there was almost after (inaudible) with teachers they just didn't want to listen because, don't know where they got it from, but the teachers think I have a bad reputation as being annoying. And I'm not, I'm really a nice person.

INT: (*laughs*)

DAVID: A lot of teachers liked me. You know I was good at (inaudible) and I wasn't good at computing but the computing teacher sort of understood me and my problems so you know, we got along. I didn't like him in the beginning, he was (inaudible) in the beginning but you know.

INT: But do you think also that the work, did it seem to be harder, or was it the same, about the same level but it's just because you can do it by...

DAVID: It's Year Ten work but I find it's easier. Just don't know why? I know why in maths because algebra doesn't make any sense. Everyone'll agree with that but this does and the people who are getting A's in algebra will find this a snap.

INT: Do you need to get good marks in this in order to able to go into the TAFE course you're going to do next year? Is it important to have high..?

DAVID: I think it is, but I sort of want to get good marks anyway. I mean, in the beginning, Dad would give me fifteen dollars for every A, ten dollars for every B, C I'd get five dollars if I got a pass, you know...

INT: But now you don't really worry about the money. Do you still get the money?

DAVID: I want the money but Dad won't give it to me. Now that I'm getting all these A's I'd love the money but Dad won't give it to me, you know.

INT: But you like getting A's, so you're going on your sense of achievement. Oh that's great, isn't it? It's been terrific that you've done so well.

DAVID: Yeah, but I'm getting bored. I want to go back to school, have a (inaudible) again. I know the teachers I don't like.

Relationships

Mr Cooke feels that teaching David himself has established a much closer relationship between the two of them. This allows him to appreciate David more than he did previously. David and his father have developed a comfortable and equitable relationship of camaraderie and mutual respect. Having established such a relationship, Mr Cooke has been able to gently coax David along as he copes with his school work. Building this relationship appears to have played an important role in allowing David to achieve success with his school work. In the following transcript, the rapport between David and his father is evident:

DAVID: You know if I missed out a couple of questions, he'd make me go back and do them.

INT: You're pretty lucky that you've got a dad who's willing to be your tutor like that though, aren't you?

DAVID: I suppose I'd agree with you now but other times I might not.

MR COOKE: (laughs) I'll leave the room David.

INT: (laughs) I mean you've got one teacher, one person, I mean everyone else has got one teacher for thirty people. It's a big difference isn't it?

DAVID: Yeah, but I sort of wish I was back at school because you know, more people.

INT: Yeah, yeah.

MR COOKE: But he's got the teacher at...

DAVID: You can talk behind the teacher's back.

INT:	So you do miss...
MR COOKE:	He doesn't talk behind my back. He talks to me straight out that's...
INT:	I can see that.
MR COOKE:	This has developed just since distance education, I never had this relationship with my older son. The one to one is more reserved but, he's more forthright and straightforward now since we've been working close together (*laughs*).

School Practices

David has an instrumental view of learning which is task-oriented and allows him to meet his goals of getting through his school work and achieving good grades. He is not intrinsically motivated, but will do the tasks in order to get good marks, please his father and be seen as successful. When he receives his work back from his teachers he always looks at the mark first and reads the comments on the cover sheet. "I read the comments but it's the marks, how I'm going you know". His father usually reads the teachers' remarks carefully and sometimes goes over the work with him. Nevertheless, David rarely reviews his work unless his father makes him do so. The materials seem to suit his learning style by providing work which can be completed without too much effort and from which he gains a sense of accomplishment. David quite happily sets to work on his daily program which has been laid out by his father. His father explains what has to be done and checks to see whether or not he understands the task and the assessment procedures. In the following extract Mr Cooke is setting David to work before leaving him to complete the task by himself:

MR COOKE:	You don't want to do that play? Reading.
DAVID:	Okay.
MR COOKE:	Okay, now look, so that, now look I'll get you going on this, where's the English, is this it here?
DAVID:	(inaudible)
MR COOKE:	Okay. Where's your activity sheet for that one there? Okay. That goes with that in there? Yes, that's where you're up to, okay? Here's your new unit. Take that package. Okay, so you've got an introductory lesson here.
MR COOKE:	Right, before you read it let's just have a look at the content here. Right, this is vocational education. Is this job for you? A list of jobs, which they say, 'If you're interested in information you can send for the brochure', alright. Look at that later, and you just write the other subject as, some books, some domestically (inaudible) decisions. It's all a decision making process (inaudible)

David. Okay. There's four lessons in each book, so I reckon we can take probably...

DAVID: No, that isn't English.

MR COOKE: ...probably a month's work. Alright about four week's work, three to four week's work for each book over the semester.

DAVID: Look at it, see what (inaudible)...

MR COOKE: Now the first one, read the letter. I need you to work with Ms Rivalland on this because I have to take Mum out, so we going to make a start on this, alright? When you've read the letter...

DAVID: (inaudible)

MR COOKE: Yeah, it is. Have a look on the board. There, where is it, vocational education, there it is, there see. Twelve lessons, first one's due next week, okay. Now, this is quite an easy unit. You're not going to do strictly a set. They're going to give you marks but at the end you're not going to get an A, B, C or D (inaudible).

DAVID: Aw.

MR COOKE: They're going to give you a, you know, a pass for it, so it's not going to be heavy like a maths or science or a (inaudible). It's sort of a reading and talking through this one about your future. The, can you read that letter and then do Lesson One, up to Lesson One. Can I just leave you with it, so I'll just ask Mum. You'll find that you scrape through by reading through that. Ms Rivalland can ask you questions, as how you're going (inaudible) No problems there but it's mainly an introduction on what it's about. Okay, Lesson One and the letter. Maybe Ms Rivalland can ask you what you've read. Okay, I'll be gone for about ten minutes.

David has a clear understanding of what is required of him and how to manage the materials. He can explain the purpose of the introduction to different units of work and predicts easily how the materials are likely to work. He enjoys reading the introductory letter from the teacher and then proceeds to read the index, survey the text and complete the starting date. David explains this process as follows:

DAVID: It's just asking me questions about, say how long (inaudible) on each lesson, how many books are there in a unit, how many lessons are there in a book and...

INT: Why do you think they do that at the beginning of the unit?

DAVID: Just to make you accustomed to the time frame.

When doing an English activity, David read through three pages of notes which explained past, present and future tense. He skimmed through these notes with apparent ease and proceeded to complete the task. As David completed this activity, he read the task requirements, then read the text quickly and skimmed through the section which explained why the past tense is usually used for narratives. To him, the discussion about tense in stories appeared not to relate directly to the task and was therefore dealt with very quickly. In the following transcript, it is evident that David understood the importance of not mixing tenses, however, he appears to be less clear about the relevance of this information to his own written narratives:

INT: Right. Okay. (pause 5 mins) Can you tell me what the task is that you are doing?

DAVID: Um, well it's all tenses and you've got to put them in the present tense and I have to just write it in the past tense. Change all these words so I'm (inaudible), changing the paragraph so that it fits the past tenses, I think.

INT: Right, I see. Why do you think that they give you those sorts of exercises to do?

DAVID: Probably writing experience, because writing has lots of different tenses, mostly past and present.

INT: Right and, has a lot of your English got tasks like that in it? I mean, what sort of different things do you get asked to do in English?

DAVID: Well, this book, this is a new unit, (inaudible). I've already been asked to read this story and then go to Page Three. They've given me this and then I have to write the (inaudible) story, and it's asked me to read another story, then it's asked me to write all this (inaudible) story including this stuff, and then it's asked me...

INT: I see, this exercise you're doing on tenses, is that related to the story? Is that a little excerpt out of the story?

DAVID: No, it's just tenses, different, it's, I'll show you. Back here, it's got the same thing on past, present tense and it's just teaching us to use just one tense because if you use it all together it sounds really weird. Like 'The woman who wait in silence while she cradled her...'

INT: Right.

DAVID: I have to write these all in past tense (inaudible).

INT: Right, now, after you've done it, or have you already done it? Did you have to write a story

yourself after you've read those other stories to have to work out the character and the setting and everything? Did you have to write a story of your own?

DAVID: No I just have to answer last (inaudible) I don't know what happens after that I just...

INT: Right, okay...

DAVID: ...Just basically do it as soon as you come to it.

INT: You found it fairly easy thing for you to do?

DAVID: Yeah, I think I've got it worked out. I read through it and changed each word as I came to it.

INT: Right okay (*pause 25 secs*). When you've finished doing this will your father come and check what you've done, or does he check it for you?

DAVID: I usually just go onto the end of the period unless I have a problem, and then he teaches with me at end of the day sometimes.

English

David reads confidently and believes reading is to be enjoyed. He appears to be a fast and efficient reader if he his interested in what he is reading. "I suppose I like reading for the sake of reading as a leisure but, if I have to do some work on it, I suppose I just have to because I want to get the mark and pass so, there it is, a necessity so I do it". He is loath to read if he does not find the task interesting and easy. "English is okay when I can understand the work... I prefer it when things are easy but if they have to be a little bit hard I don't mind but if they get stupidly hard, it's stupid". He finds writing assignments rather tedious, but with a little encouragement from his father he jots down a brief plan then writes the essay and does some minor editing of punctuation and spelling. He is clearly not anxious to revise his essays as he likes things "to be easy". When he doesn't know how to spell a word he "usually writes it down to see what it looks like," then he will sometimes consult a dictionary or ask his father because, "Dad's usually right". David explained to me what he believes are the important things about reading and writing:

DAVID: I don't know. Other people. Just (inaudible) saying 'Oh you can't do that' and stuff, but I've learned to love reading and so I'm better than those people now, you know.

INT: So when you come to a word you don't know or those sorts of things when you're reading in your materials and that, what do you do?

DAVID: Read the words around it.

INT: Right.

DAVID: Because the words around it will give you a clue what it is. If I still don't know I ask someone else.

INT: So you actually concentrate on getting meaning out of it all the time?

DAVID: The idea of reading is to get a meaning out of it, you know.

INT: Right. And what about in writing, what do you concentrate on when your writing?

DAVID: Making sense and getting across, the idea that I'm trying to get across.

So long as they hold some interest for him, David enjoys the novels he is asked to read. He prefers to "just read for pleasure" and doesn't really like having to answer questions about the novels he has read. However, if it is necessary to do such activities in order to gain good marks, David's instrumental view of schooling enables him to do so. Consequently he does sufficient work to answer the prescribed questions but exerts the minimum effort required in order to complete the task. His pragmatic approach to these reading tasks does not encourage full engagement with a text or facilitate critical or interpretative readings of texts. As he put it "I just read, if I like what I'm reading I just keep reading. If I have to read it, I read it, and comprehend as much as possible".

David adopts the same instrumental approach to writing. His main purpose appears to be getting the task done with as little pain as possible. In the following example he explains how he completes his written assignments:

DAVID: Writing short stories I usually put a circle, write ideas, and then just branch certain words and they'll help me. In an essay I just research, do it. Complain and do it.

MR COOKE: (*laughs*)

INT: So when you say you research, can you tell me a bit more about that, how you go about it?

DAVID: Well, it depends on what the essay's about? Say it's on World War Two, which I have done one, I looked up the *World Book Encyclopedia*, and found the information and then started.

INT: When you found the information what did you do with it after that?

DAVID: I conveyed it to paper, just changing it around so it wasn't exactly copied.

INT: Right, you didn't write notes on it, first, just little notes?

DAVID: Well, I did a draft, it was fair few little notes but basically I was just conveying the knowledge and (inaudible).

INT: And when you've put down your notes do you spend any time thinking about what order you're going to put the paragraphs in or something? Do you find that hard or..?

DAVID: Basically I just, I write the same, I just use different wording I think. I just basically just copy it out. Nobody'll notice, I mean I take the odd note off (inaudible), not really.

INT: So why do you do it like that? Do you think that works well?

DAVID: It works for me. It's the plan of attack I learnt.

INT: Right. Do you think that in Social Studies you'd do better if you actually just took notes and then wrote the essay?

DAVID: I don't think I could do better. I think the plan of attack I've got is the right way to go, and I don't think I could do better.

On the other hand, because he is interested in the construction of media effects and the details provided about filming, David appeared to engage fully with the media unit he had just completed. For him, this unit provided information which links to his interest in "media novels" and thus seems practical and useful. In the following excerpt he tells me about the unit:

> Yeah and it's got down the back 'Breathing Her Last' and it's got the story, and what lighting I have to do and they've got it back here, and it's got 'Shot number, take one, time just before sunset. Extreme close up of old lady's face and hands, low key lighting, shot description, audio atmosphere, only sound is of a baby's deep breathing, and the next shot, take two, close up of old lady's relatives waiting expectantly (inaudible), atmosphere, more breathing, more shadow on face', and so on and it goes on.

Similarly David's interest in cartooning and media has encouraged him to engage fully with the drama units he has completed. He enjoys tape recording dramatic readings and putting in the sound effects. Since the family have a small theatre in their home, he often includes other members of the family and performs his work in the family theatre.

Maths and science

David's instrumental and pragmatic construction of learning appears to serve him well in science and maths. He enjoys these subjects "because I can do it and it's no trouble really. When it's trouble I don't like it". As the following extract indicates, the content and learning activities match his learning style and fulfil his need for learning to be practical and enjoyable:

> Well a lot of the topics I just didn't, I just didn't see why I had to study it if I wasn't going to use it later on in life. A lot of things

that I don't, that was with Algebra. It was back at school. I hated it. Algebra. I didn't see what I was going to use it for but with this it's Maths for Living and, you know, it's paving and budgets and stuff like that and I can see the sense in it so I do it and, you know, it's enjoyable.

On another occasion, David described how science relates to his own life and is therefore interesting and worth learning:

INT:	What do you think of the materials?
DAVID:	It's interesting. It's learning.
INT:	Right. What's interesting about it?
DAVID:	Well, in the last book, I had to actually go out and do a transact, that's a line along, and work out, put the plants in sectors, and then animals and worms and spiders and, you know, we went across to the park and did one and, you know.
INT:	Right. So it's practical and it sort of relates to things you can...
DAVID:	You've got book work but you can also, you also go out and get a..

Social Studies

Social studies is the bane of David's life. It is a subject which requires students to read for information, not pleasure, to re-read the text numerous times for the purpose of analysis, to research information in other related texts and to link events and phenomena to current issues in the field. Accordingly, David feels the subject is irrelevant because he can see no practical purpose in what he is doing. There is a clear mismatch between David's construction of reading and the subject requirements of social studies. Since he is mainly interested in reading for pleasure and not analysis, he finds the reading and writing requirements of the subject tedious and annoying. His usual approach of just "getting the task done" is inadequate in this subject, which requires him to engage with the task more fully, if he is to gain the high marks he prefers to get. During his discussions with me, he returned to the difficulties of social studies on numerous occasions. In the following extract his construction of reading and learning are evident:

DAVID:	It's just reading, I don't mind reading if the reading's interesting, if it's not (inaudible). The reading is interesting but the questions they just make me go 'I have to read it again and this time the reading isn't interesting' because I'm just looking for one specific thing and I can't...
INT:	So you don't actually like reading just to recall facts. You'd rather read just to understand the whole thing.

DAVID: I'd rather read to understand it and then just go on to something else.

INT: Right. And do you actually think that also this is a bit hard to understand sometimes or is that alright. That's okay.

DAVID: Not really, not really, I can understand it. It's just going back and doing it.

He later went on to explain his lack of interest in doing research:

INT: What is it about social studies you don't like?

DAVID: It's just doesn't make any sense to me.

INT: Doesn't make any sense.

DAVID: I mean, I know about other countries and all about the world but I don't particularly want to know anything exceptional, and the unit I'm doing at the moment it just says, 'Read this page and answer these questions'. And half the time, you read the page, and say,'Right I know all them there'. One or two of the questions is to do with the information on the page and the other ones are just nothing to do with it.

INT: Oh right.

DAVID: You know, your supposed to go to this book and research these pages and then you're supposed to go to this book and research these pages, and by the time you've gone through all of that ,you've forgotten what the question is.

INT: But don't you find it interesting though about, finding about the other people in other countries? You don't find that, you're not interested.

David's sense of humour sometimes enables him to engage in work he finds tedious. He told me how he had found a calculation error in one of the units about the death rate of people in Asia, "I worked it out on my calculator and it wasn't actually, in fact, 6.432 people per second". He had re-worked the mathematics on the basis of the information and informed his teacher of the error. He also explained how he had uncovered an error in one of the maths units on tessellation. He had been able to tessellate shapes which the text stated could not be tessellated, so he wrote to his teacher "whoever made up this book, try making shapes like this out of the triangles and then use that, I think you'll find it's a very good paving shape".

Conclusion

David appears to be a bright student who, through ill-health and an inability to fit in to school, had moved into a cycle of failure. Through the support provided by his father he has become highly motivated to achieve well at

school. The distance mode of learning on the whole appears to suit his personal learning style and has permitted him to achieve success in many of his subjects. There is a quiet confidence behind his timid exterior. The materials he works with on the whole appeal to his practical nature and allow him to get tasks done without too much effort and to achieve good marks. This instrumental view of learning serves him well in maths and science, however, it appears to be more problematic in subjects which require sustained responses or in-depth engagement with the texts. Although he is an avid reader of fiction, his construction of reading and writing as practices to be engaged in mainly for pleasure and entertainment, does not allow him to take full advantage of his literacy skills when they need to be applied to more complex intellectual tasks. His interest in cartooning has led him to choose a non-academic pathway for Years 11 and 12.

CHAPTER 13
CASE STUDY 7: CHRISTOPHER DANIELS

Judith Rivalland

It was considered important to include one family of "travellers" in our case studies because around 40% of the students between Years 6 and 10 who are studying by distance education in Western Australia are travellers. These travellers include children from expatriate families who are working overseas and wish to keep their children on an Australian curriculum, seasonal workers who move to where they can find work, and families who take extended holidays to travel around Australia. Because these families are often on the move and receive their materials through the post restante at the local post office, it was difficult to find a family which was available for this study. Eventually, I tracked Chris down to a caravan park in the Northern Territory. On my first visit to the family caravan, I found no-one at home, so I left a note for the family indicating that I would return in the late afternoon. When I returned, Mr Daniels told me that they had been expecting me to be from the Education Department, because people are frequently suspicious about families who do not send their children to school - they had sometimes been reported for not sending Chris to school. We shared a laugh about the issue and then discussed the research project. Mr and Mrs Daniels were very interested in what we were doing but then explained that Chris was using Queensland materials and the Queensland term had just finished. After some discussion it was decided that Chris could begin the next term's lessons and I could return to watch him at work the following day.

Mr and Mrs Daniels have two children, Jeannie who is studying at university, and Chris who is in Year 8 at high school. Mr and Mrs Daniels both migrated from England when they were children. Mr Daniels left school in England at 15 and did not continue his schooling when he arrived in Australia, whereas Mrs Daniels finished primary school in England and then moved with her parents to Australia where she completed her high schooling to year 10. She claimed she had been a good student but her parents had come "from the old system, of a girl doesn't need an education, a boy does". There were four girls in her family who were all expected to get married, "that's the old way of looking at it," while her brother had gone on to become a very successful engineer. She is enjoying working with Chris on his high school studies because she is able to pick up some of the things she had forgotten and to learn new things in the area of science and social studies. Mr Daniels learnt the trade of roof tiling, but he has also done earth moving and run a very successful cabinet making business. Mrs Daniels has worked in sales and business administration. She did all of the book-keeping for the family cabinet making business.

The Daniels family have been adventurous all of their married lives. Just after they were married, when Jeannie was a baby, instead of buying a house they decided to buy a comfortable caravan and travel around Australia. Mrs Daniels described the way they made that decision as follows:

> Well, it was back in '74. It was Ian's idea and we came along. We moved into a house that we were going to buy. The owner didn't want to sell until after the end of the financial year because he's already sold one for tax reasons, and so we moved into the house, while we were waiting, about three months before, before the end of the financial year. Started to settle ourselves down. Jeannie had just been born and everything was looking quite good, and Ian got this idea that he' d like to caravan and he' d like to buy a caravan and go and travel. I went, ' It's crazy' , and he said, 'Why?' And nothing more was said. We talked about it that night but then nothing more was said. We decided against it and about three months later, just before sort of buying the house, I just said to him one day, 'Oh, do you still want to go into a caravan and travel?' and, of course, he could see me wavering, and it was just sorted out and all over and done with really, within a couple of weeks, you know. He had everything ordered. We bought a new van and we, I wanted it made exactly what I felt was comfortable and needed, and we had to wait five weeks for that but it was all well under way and we' re off.

After Jeannie finished her first two years at school they sold the caravan and settled back in Melbourne where they both sought regular work. Later they set up a successful business. "We had a house, that was eighty squares, sitting on six acres. Four stables up the back and a tractor and all leather for seats, and the full thing and a tennis court out the front and a swimming pool out the back," she said. Both Mr and Mrs Daniels worked very hard in this business and now feel they left Jeannie with too much responsibility for bringing up Chris. When Chris completed primary school they felt it was important to spend time together with him as a family, so they decided to sell their business and travel again until Chris reaches Year 10, when it will be important for him to resume high school. "We haven't got any regrets from the house and bit, we've been there, we've done that, now we'll go and do this again and we don't know what's next". Mr and Mrs Daniels do not feel there is a financial necessity for them to work, however they have taken on some work as they have been travelling because they felt Chris had access to money without ever realising its worth. "He thought nothing of it, and that, so we purposely sort of took on a bit of work thinking ' Make him do some work' so that he could see his own value. He's got to have some value for money".

Previously when they travelled with Jeannie, they did not use distance education because Mr and Mrs Daniels both had to work during the day. However Jeannie was an outgoing child who coped very well with the constant moving from school to school. Now and again she missed parts of the curriculum as they moved from one state system to another, but generally Mrs Daniels felt she learned so much by travelling that this compensated for any

problems with the curriculum. On the other hand, Mrs Daniels was concerned about Chris being shy, so she decided to put him on distance education rather than sending him to different schools as they moved around. She felt confident that he would be able to cope with the work because he had been the top student at the primary school he attended in 1993. The family have found managing the distance education program quite easy as, "we have a lot of commitment to our boy". They have established a routine whereby Chris is expected to complete his lessons in the mornings to avoid the heat of the day. Chris knows that the family will not be able to go sight-seeing until his school work is done, so this provides him with motivation to get his work completed. In addition, because she doesn't work, Mrs Daniels feels the job of supervision is really easy for her as she can devote the whole morning to helping Chris.

Aspirations

Chris wants to join the navy and study at the defence academy in Canberra. The family are very happy with the idea. They are not quite sure if he will need to finish Year 12 before he enters the academy so they are currently inquiring into the entry requirements. At the moment, Chris is not sure of what aspect of naval life he wishes to engage in:

> I used to want to be a chef, and have my own restaurant and that, and then all the navy ships come up here and they, and we saw one. We saw the HMAS Darwin and they took you around and that was good and then I thought I might join the navy but I didn't want to, guns or anything like that, I, so I thought I'd become a chef. I wanted to become a marine biologist but then I thought no...

Whatever choice Chris makes, Mr and Mrs Daniels feel he has the capacity to cope with the work and will provide him with as much support as possible, "and we're just going to have to keep trekking across the countryside to whatever port he comes in".

Family Literacy practices

Reading

Both Mrs Daniels and Chris are avid readers of mystery novels, so they often share books which are borrowed from the local library. The whole family visits the public library frequently and Mr Daniels often takes Chris to the library to do research for social studies. Before they sold their home they had a very large library. They sold many of their books before setting out on their travels, but they couldn't bear to throw many of them away, so they still have about seven cartons of books in storage.

Chris brought a few of his favourite books with him but mainly relies on the local library for his weekly reading. He usually reads at least one book a week because he only has time to read at night and he often falls asleep. He had just read *A Touch of Chill* by Joan Aitken. Chris enjoyed these short stories although he found them quite different to the usual horror story genre: "It's a funny

book because it' s not like ' Once upon a time' and that. It starts off like, it starts off like, somebody will walk into the room and then it just..... ". He enjoys "mysteries...whodunits and stuff like that and, Mum reads Agatha Christie so I usually read her books before they go back to the library and I like Cecile Corrow and things like that". Mrs Daniels reads as much as she can "While Chris is doing school work I'll quite often sit and read and there's a good hour or so in the afternoon when I'll read and before I go to sleep at night". Mr Daniels prefers to read the newspaper and information about the areas they visit.

Writing

The first time the Daniels went travelling, Mrs Daniels kept a diary of their travels. Now Mr Daniels has taken over this role: "He maintains we should write a book on our travels the first time but I don't know, I might get around to doing it and give it a try". Mrs Daniels enjoys letter writing so she writes about two letters a week to different members of their extended family. Chris doesn't like writing letters and, although he misses all of his friends from his old school, he rarely writes to them. He does, however, write to Jeannie because he likes to tell her about things he doesn't discuss with his parents:

> I usually do that because I usually tell Jeannie just by, I just, I don't tell Mum and Dad, like I wrote to Jeannie and say, ' Well this happened and this' because Mum doesn't know, and she didn't tell them and so, just stuff that me and Jeannie keep to ourselves though. She writes back and there's a separate letter for Mum and Dad, and a separate letter for me and... .

Chris and his mother enjoy doing crosswords and puzzles together, particularly when they are travelling:

> MRS DANIELS: Chris and I love doing crosswords and puzzles and.....
>
> INT: Oh do you, right?
>
> CHRIS: Crosswords and puzzles and acrostics...
>
> MRS DANIELS: Anything that' s a mystery you like to get cleared up.

Television and Computing

The family don't have a computer with them while they are travelling. However, they had a computer at home which Chris used all of the time, especially to play computer games. Chris has a Game Boy on which he plays computer games when they are travelling. Although Mr and Mrs Daniels can use a computer, they have not used one very much as Mrs Daniels quite enjoyed doing the accounts and the mail manually.

Although there is a television in the caravan the family don't watch a lot of television. Chris usually watches from about 4.30 PM until 6.00 PM. He enjoys watching informational programs:

> I like *Wonderworld* because it tells you facts about, you know, they go out and find out about things and tell you how it works and that, and that's good. And on Thursdays and Fridays, Thursdays they've got *Hot Science* and that' s a real good program, and Friday they've got their *Curiosity show*, and we all sit down and watch that and that's good. I like shows like that.

Mr and Mrs Daniels watch the ABC or SBS. They like to see the *News*, *A Current Affair*, the *7-30 Report* and *Quantum*. They occasionally switch to a commercial station to watch a film but they generally don't watch soap operas. "We' re not into *Home and Away* and all that," Mrs Daniels said. While reading appears to be strongly constructed as entertainment, the family appear to have shaped TV viewing as an informational practice related to learning and knowing about the world.

Doing Distance Education

The Daniels live in a large caravan which has two separate bedrooms as well as a lounge/dining/kitchen area. When I arrived to spend the day with Chris the kitchen was already tidied and Chris had all of his work books out on the kitchen table where he usually works. Chris has a dictionary and tape recorder in the caravan but usually has to go to the local library to consult encyclopedias or get additional resources.

Initially Mrs Daniels helped Chris work out his daily timetable but he now organises his own program. Mrs Daniels explained that it was important to keep her eye on Chris and help keep him motivated. At first he had been quite a dependent learner but he now worked by himself most of the time. In the following transcript she describes the process they had worked through in order to reach the comfortable working relationship they now have:

> MRS DANIELS: I found initially Chris expected me to be stuck at his side but I gradually sort of weaned myself away from that by being busy and finding all sorts of little things to do to make him get on with it by himself, and now I find a lot of comfort reading a book and if he's got a problem he...
>
> INT: And who actually monitors, that he's got the work done in terms of the time frame. Do you do that, or does he do it?
>
> MRS DANIELS: No, I do it. He will eventually learn to do these things for himself. I said to him, 'Okay Chris, well I'm not going to ride you at all about your schooling. You know what you've got to do,' and I laid it all out there for him. By about the third

> day I'd had enough of waiting. 'Look, okay, let's get into it.' He's got to be motivated and they tell me, the teachers said when I talked to them, well they're all the kids, are like that.

She often reads while he is doing his school work and then she is free to help when he needs to discuss anything or when clarification of the task is needed. She explained how she helps Chris:

> Well, he goes back. If it's, like in science, it' s very basic. It's back in the pages of the question related to that, we'll go back, sure enough, we'll find it. Sometimes I'll skim through and I'll say, ' I'll have to see where the answer is on a certain page' and I'll give it to him to read this page again. If he, he's got a bad habit, like doing English, he'll say ' How do you spell that?' and I'll make him, either get up and go get the dictionary, or I'll give him the first three letters and then tell him to figure out the rest himself.

Mrs Daniels had no problem learning how to deal with all of the materials. She found that she remembers much of it from her own school days and she enjoys reading about the things she did not learn herself. Although she can' t help Chris very much with Japanese this doesn't cause a problem because he is very good at the subject. He enjoys telling Mr and Mrs Daniels about the things he has learned in Japanese, particularly about some of the history which related to some of the places they have visited, such as the Japanese gardens at Cowra. If there are any problems which Mr and Mrs Daniels can' t resolve themselves, they appear to be very resourceful in helping Chris find out information about it:

> Yes, if me and Mum can't sort it out we, like the other day, we had this thing about post office rounds and that, and we went, we were actually in the library, and there's a post office just up in the shopping centre, in there, so we went up to the post office and we asked them and they were helpful.

Despite Mrs Daniel's concerns about motivation and keeping on task, Chris appears to fully engage with his work as he completes his different tasks. His apparent self-confidence as a scholar gained from being a top student at primary school, encourages him to complete his work as well as possible. His marks tend to reinforce this attitude to his learning. In the following example Chris describes how he uses feedback from his teachers as well as his mother:

> CHRIS: Usually the marks and that, when they send it back, the teacher will say, she'll give me sort of like an eighty percent or something and then she'll say, ' Good work, keep it up, 'and, 'Do this,' and if you get something wrong, she'll say, ' Just look back at this and read it again and try and do it again' .

INT: So you usually look at your marks first and then you look at the comments?

CHRIS: Yep yep.

INT: But do you usually have a fairly good idea before you send the work in how good it's going to be?

CHRIS: Yeah.

INT: And how do you know that?

CHRIS: Well, Mum usually reads it sometimes and she just smiles or something or says something and...

Relationships

The conscious decision to spend more time with their son appears to have led to a comfortable relationship between Chris and his parents. They support Chris by organising their time to ensure that he meets all of his schooling commitments, while at the same time leading a very interesting life as a traveller. Mrs Daniels has an easy relationship with Chris when he is working. In the following example the rapport between the two of them is evident:

MRS DANIELS: You haven't done your history.

CHRIS: I'm having a break

MRS DANIELS: You've had enough breaks.

CHRIS: Remember the lady said in a school of distance education that you should have a break between every subject and...

MRS DANIELS: You always remember the good bits don't you?

As she works with Chris, Mrs Daniels takes on the role of a co-learner, jointly working through the text to resolve any problems with him. She has developed a non-threatening, conversational and equitable dialogue style to scaffold Chris' s learning. The following example of Mrs Daniels helping Chris with a problem in science is typical of the way learning is constructed for him. Notice the way she shows him where to look in the text for the correct information, refocusses him on the question, clarifies the question and then clarifies the answer:

MRS DANIELS: If you look along the name of whales, sea lions, and orcas that might help you. A group of animals, mammals is it? Have a look at your scale to (inaudible).

CHRIS: It wasn't in the scale, think it wasn't. Just look. (*pause 25 secs*)

MRS DANIELS: (inaudible) Where did it talk about mammals?

CHRIS: Didn't talk about mammals much.

MRS DANIELS: It must of or it wouldn't ask the question. (*reading*) Started off talking about fossils, and then

(inaudible) then the rock that they were found in. (*pause 10 secs*)

CHRIS: See this, there' s mammals.

MRS DANIELS: It just says 'earliest reptiles.' What's the question? From which group of animals did mammals develop? This is your note that the animal group, see.

CHRIS: Yeah, I know.

MRS DANIELS: See here. Branches of the tree register different groups (*pause 10 secs*). Well, if you follow that graph, okay, from the earliest reptiles...

CHRIS: Just put the earliest reptiles.

School Practices

With an apparently clear understanding of his whole program, Chris quickly began his work for the day. He easily articulated what work needed to be done:

INT: Can you just tell what the, what your lessons are about today?

CHRIS: About dinosaurs. This is for the week, like I do some questions a day. I do about ten questions a day, just about dinosaurs, just different kinds, and they just vary. Last week I did Atoms, things like that.

INT: Right, and so how many lessons, do you just do one lesson a day usually?

CHRIS: Yeah just, yeah just one lesson, yeah.

INT: And about how many lessons a week, do you do of science?

CHRIS: Well this is a week's reading. I only read a day and then that's one day's answer, that's another day's answer and that's and other days, that's another days and I only do four days and the fifth day is for just catching up and correcting.

Mrs Daniels is careful to make sure Chris writes in full sentences whenever possible as she believes that writing things down reinforces what is being learned. She explained this to me as follows:

> He writes it out in full. His history started out like that but then I think it becomes too easy to just fill a word in and then what can you do? I always thought that learning, I mean, I had an elderly lady taught me history at school and all she ever did was walk in and start pounding away on the blackboard, and it was surprising how well I did in history. That, you know, it seemed to sink in

because we were actually writing it out and discussing it. You see this fill a word in the space doesn't have quite the same effect so...

Science

Chris began work on a section of the text which deals with the evolutionary tree of living things. There is a complex diagram entitled "part of the evolutionary tree of living things" on one side of the page with some "points to note about the animal group tree" listed on the opposite page. Chris briefly looked at the diagram and then quickly read the ten points. The following is a transcript of the text he read:

> 1. The trunk of a tree represents a group of the earliest reptiles that lived on earth. Scientists believed that these developed from the earliest amphibians. 2. The branches of the tree represent different groups of animals that developed from earliest reptiles. 3. The dash beginnings of branches show that scientists are uncertain of the exact time when the earliest species of each group first appeared. 4. A number of groups of reptiles developed from the earliest reptiles. 5. Classes or groups, in brackets, of birds and mammals developed from the earliest reptiles. 6. Some groups of reptiles have become extinct while other groups exist today. 7. Of the groups that exist today many species in these groups have become extinct. Today there are some known species of crocodiles and alligators. Fossils show that at least a hundred and eight species have become extinct. 8. The group called marine reptiles included Egyptosaurus, Pleisiosuarus and others, all of which are now extinct. These reptiles lived all of their lives in the sea and the females gave birth to live young. Species of sea snakes that exist today have these features. Scientists, however, have placed sea snakes in the snakes and lizards group because of their body structure.

He read the text with ease, obviously conversant with the topic words about Dinosaurs. He then quickly skimmed through the following reading questions:

R 4.	Why can't we include present day turtles in this 'marine reptiles' group:
R 5-8	These questions refer to the ' animal group tree' and scale.
5.	Name the groups of reptiles that developed from the 'earliest reptiles'.
6.	Name the groups of reptiles that have become extinct.
7.	When did the dinosaurs become extinct? HINT: Place a ruler across the 'tree' so that its top edge lies along the tops of the dinosaurs' columns then read the number of millions years ago on the scale on the left.
8.	From which group do scientists think that the birds developed?

Ignoring the rest of the questions and the text, Chris moved straight on to answer the related test questions at the back of the booklet because these were the answers which had to be submitted to the teacher. Obviously, what counts for Chris, is getting the work which has to be marked completed as quickly as possible. However, because he had not fully understood the diagram or the associated reading he became confused by the second question he attempted. At this point Mrs Daniels stepped in to make sure he engaged with the text more effectively. Once again, notice how Mrs Daniels refocusses Chris on the question and helps him re-read the appropriate part of the text in order to answer the question:

MRS DANIELS: What does it say here?

How many groups of reptiles are there (inaudible)? Okay how many?

CHRIS: (inaudible)

MRS DANIELS: Well, have a look here, maybe we should read through it again.

CHRIS: Not that (inaudible).

MRS DANIELS: Read through it all again. (*pause 42 secs*) You read it?

CHRIS: Yeah

MRS DANIELS: Okay, now try again. How many groups of reptiles does this one say?

CHRIS: Well, there was five, but there was birds and mammals.

MRS DANIELS: It says ' of reptiles' . How many groups are there today of reptiles?

CHRIS: (inaudible), snakes and lizards, and (inaudible) and, (inaudible). Four.

MRS DANIELS: Does it say on there, on the scale here. Which ones are (inaudible)... ?

CHRIS: (inaudible) today, these ones are living today, here.

MRS DANIELS: Here.

CHRIS: Yeah. Air reptiles, sea reptiles, and air reptiles. See, they're not kind of birds and mammals.

MRS DANIELS: (inaudible) three groups of reptiles.

CHRIS: Good. (*pause 17 secs*)

Mrs Daniels continued to scaffold his answers successfully until he became very confused by the following question:

> One student described dinosaurs as, "two groups of lizards that lived on the land from 225 to 65 million years ago, then became extinct".

This definition is incorrect. Correct it.

At first Chris focussed on the time period as the incorrect piece of information, so Mrs Daniels engaged in a lengthy discussion with him. In the following discussion we see Mrs Daniels showing Chris how to establish which part of the proposition is correct, then having established that the time period in the statement was correct she refocussed him on the other part of the sentence.

MRS DANIELS: Which definition is incorrect? Correct it.

CHRIS: Mmmm.

MRS DANIELS: What s wrong with it?

CHRIS: One (inaudible).

MRS DANIELS: There were three and, three what?

CHRIS: Well, there was, in the book, it only says, orca there but there was only as well, but now they say that air ones and then, and water ones weren't really dinosaurs.

MRS DANIELS: Yeah. Right. And so, what' s that? And were they lizards? Were they two groups of lizards?

CHRIS: Yeah. Dinosaur means terrible lizard.

MRS DANIELS: Pardon?

CHRIS: Dinosaur means terrible lizard.

MRS DANIELS: Right, so how are you going to rewrite so that's correct.

CHRIS: It wasn't sixty five million years ago, it was about fifteen, I think. It wasn't sixty five.

MRS DANIELS: It wasn't sixty five?

CHRIS: That's what it says here, see, and it says sixty.

MRS DANIELS: No, that period when dinosaurs ruled the land, that was up to there. See the dinosaurs there. Where's the ruler?

CHRIS: (inaudible)

MRS DANIELS: See. See your dinosaurs, so the period of timing's right. What's next? Did it finish at 225? It started at 225 here. So the period of time is right. You've got a, so that's all okay and that part of it's alright, and they became extinct. The two groups of lizards that lived on the land is not. Did both groups live on the land?

CHRIS: No.

Mrs Daniels continued talking with Chris in order to lead him towards the correct information. In the following transcript, Mrs Daniels enables Chris to recognise the error in the statement, gently coaxing him on, by jointly constructing the important knowledge with him. First she helped him to establish in which part of the proposition the error was to be found. Having

done this, she encouraged him to go back and check whether or not dinosaurs were in fact lizards. Eventually, Chris realised he had misinterpreted the text which actually stated, "Dinosaurs came from the Greek word meaning 'terrible lizard' but they were in fact not lizards". When Chris had resolved the difficulty, Mrs Daniels went on to show him how to frame his answer into the sentence, "dinosaurs are two groups of reptiles that lived on the land". Through her actions, Mrs Daniels shaped Chris's reading practices to encourage him to look more carefully at the diagrams and the text before completing his test papers:

MRS DANIELS: So that part is wrong isn't it? So how are you going to rewrite it? You've got to write that, you've got to write ' two groups of' , here's your pen, this part here and from there on is okay. You've got to change that part there, something in that, or all of that, is wrong. Now is there two groups? They've just stated the time. You thought there was three groups.

CHRIS: There look. I only thought there was two groups of reptiles,(inaudible).

MRS DANIELS: That's just what I said to you, (inaudible).

CHRIS: Dinosaur means terrible lizard.

MRS DANIELS: That's what it says in your book in the cover, does it? Is that where you got that from?

CHRIS: That's what it said, that's what it said.

MRS DANIELS: Because that's what the books that you buy in the shops say but if it's not saying that there then that could be...

CHRIS: Just said back here. Now that I read here, let's see. 'The name dinosaurs came from two Greek words meaning terrible lizard' .

MRS DANIELS: Right. Actually...

CHRIS: Actually ...were not lizards.

MRS DANIELS: Dinosaurs were not lizards.

CHRIS: ...not all of them would have flight.

MRS DANIELS: Aha. You've got to read it all properly. (inaudible) one thing, then it proves it actually was wrong.

CHRIS: Dinosaurs are, that says that...

MRS DANIELS: Well you can write ' dinosaurs are two groups of reptiles that lived on the land...'

CHRIS: Yeah

MRS DANIELS: ' ... and then became extinct.' That's what was wrong. (*pause 15 secs*). In other words they're saying they shouldn't have been called dinosaurs really, it's the translation. Look. Yeah (*laughs*).

Without any conscious awareness of her actions, Mrs Daniels was a co-learner of the topic. Using sophisticated informational reading skills, she intuitively shaped the reading practices used by Chris to complete his science. She also provided scaffolding to help him use appropriate scientific language in his writing. Through her intervention, Mrs Daniels modifies the instinctive desire of Chris to get the task completed with as little effort as possible.

Social Studies

The Queensland social studies program is divided into separate units of history and geography. For Chris, the courses are inherently interesting because he is often able to visit the places or historic sites under discussion in his work. When I visited him he was working through his second semester history program and was completing a unit on Gold Fever. He took a long time to get started on the unit because he was anxious to tell me of his own experiences of going prospecting and visiting Sovereign Hill. He appeared to have gathered a lot of general knowledge about prospecting. He told me about some of the very large nuggets which had been found and how one of them had been melted down and sold for gold. Apparently nuggets "hold more value in the nugget than they do as gold". Mrs Daniels explained, "it's like a painting. I mean if you value the canvas, the frame, the paint on it, I suppose all the work that goes into it, its worth so many thousand dollars but because it is that painting it's probably worth millions". Chris went on to clarify this for me:

> Said in this book, reading somewhere, 'The sound of gold' and it costs some money. Here, 'The Gregory lump, worth nearly fifty thousand dollars at yesterday's local prices could fetch up to one hundred thousand dollars as a collector's item.'

Mrs Daniels coaxed Chris to become involved in his work by encouraging him to link his own experiences to his studies. The following example shows how she did this:

MRS DANIELS: Come on, on with your lesson (*laughs*). Did you read enough about the gold? Did you see Ophir on the map?

CHRIS: No I haven't seen the map yet. Ophir. That's it, O for Ophir.

MRS DANIELS: Hills Ends is where, when we get back next year. Remember that couple beside the creek and we were helping them, had boy the same age as you called Chris...

CHRIS: Yeah.

MRS DANIELS: ...well, when we go to Melbourne, we're going to Hill End.

CHRIS: Are we going next year?

MRS DANIELS: Oh yeah, we'll go at the end of the year. Have to get all our travelling done next year? Okay what's it, first, what are the questions? Oh, you've got to learn that part.

CHRIS: (inaudible)

MRS DANIELS: Well, you haven't got to learn it, you just quickly skim over it but see you've done all those things anyway, (inaudible), haven't you? We had a guy when we were at...

CHRIS: That guy at Hill End, the father, the one that we were just talking about...

MRS DANIELS: Yeah.

CHRIS: ...he had one of those long things. I've got more of a chute kind of thing, and then with a (inaudible) and that, and you put it in the real rapids, and you put dirt in it and it, it sticks together all.

MRS DANIELS: That's right yeah.

CHRIS: And they don't have it?

MRS DANIELS: It was another word in the book, it's like a sluice, back of a sluice box, and it was just another version of the cradle. The cradle was put into water and they used to rock, to make the water, to keep the water through. He had another version that sat in the running water and the force there had to move it. Alluvial gold.

Later when Chris had to do some writing, Mrs Daniels again jointly constructed a written text with Chris in order to show him how to structure the text appropriately. The is demonstrated through the following dialogue:

MRS DANIELS: What about this lot of questions. We're really getting off this history, aren't we? (*laughs*) Have you got your page ready?

CHRIS: What page? ' Write a sentence explaining each of the following, as fully as possible. Gold fever, puddling, cradling, shaft mining, miner's right.'

MRS DANIELS: Well, I'll give you a hand then. You get your page out ready and you will discuss gold fever.

CHRIS: No, can't write.

MRS DANIELS: So what was gold fever?

CHRIS: That was gold...

MRS DANIELS: Don' t be silly. You' ve got to write one sentence, explaining gold fever.

CHRIS: One sentence. ' Gold fever was, mmm, everyone, when they found gold everyone decided that, even if they...'

MRS DANIELS: When gold was...

CHRIS: Yeah, when gold was, yeah, yeah.

MRS DANIELS: But they didn't find because they had to go after it, didn't they?

CHRIS: Yeah, when gold, as I was saying, when gold was discovered, everyone decided that they could find gold even (inaudible) and all went down to that area and, and...'

MRS DANIELS: (*laughs*) What a lot of ands. Gold fever would have been like, it would have been a crazy sort of mania...

CHRIS: For riches.

MRS DANIELS: For riches that came from, and it didn't take a few people they all do it. We all try it.

CHRIS: I do.

MRS DANIELS: Because everybody wants to be rich one day. Gold fever was.. gets into people.

Through Mrs Daniel's lively discussions about their travels she subtly encouraged Chris to connect his own knowledge to the topic under study and to write about this knowledge in language suited to the subject area. Notice how she helped him move from a the simple answer "that was gold" to using the sentence, "when gold was discovered, everyone decided that they could find gold".

Music

Chris enjoys his music lessons and obviously feels comfortable as he engages in them. Mrs Daniels and Chris listened to the music tape as if it were entertainment. After listening to a number of different instruments playing, the following questions were asked:

> Here is question two. Number down your page from one to five. Five instruments are illustrated. You will hear five pieces of music. Write the name of the instrument that' s being played next to the appropriate number. Number one (*musical segment*).

In the following dialogue it is evident that Mrs Daniels feels Chris has as much expertise as she does in this subject, so she uses these lessons as an opportunity to learn along with Chris:

CHRIS: Violin.

MRS DANIELS: (inaudible)

TAPE: (*musical segment*)

CHRIS: I remember its last name.

TAPE: Two. (*musical segment*)

CHRIS: It' s a big one isn't it?

INT: Mmm.

MRS DANIELS: Sounds like the cello or the oboe?

CHRIS: Have a (inaudible).

MRS DANIELS: Is it? Which is the cello do you think?

CHRIS: Cello see look it's got, it says, see it has that space at the bottom that goes into the...

MRS DANIELS: Oh that's that, that's the really big one and that's...

CHRIS: Yeah, that's the double bass and that's the (inaudible) as well, but that's the viola and the violin.

MRS DANIELS: Oh yeah, okay.

TAPE: (*musical segment*)

English

Chris did not complete any English on the day I visited him. However, his fluency in reading was evident during his science and history lessons. He demonstrated effective word identification strategies and described his reading practices as follows:

CHRIS: You have to be patient.

INT: Right.

CHRIS: Think you have to be to, you have to be good at other things as well as reading, as like, spelling and that. You have to be, I think you have to be pretty good at spelling to be a real good reader, to understand some of the words and...

INT: And what do you have to know how to do if you come to words that you don' t know?

CHRIS: Well, usually if I read a book and I might come up to a word that I don' t know, I usually read the sentence before, you know, and that gives me the..I read the sentence before and the sentence that the word is in, and that gives you a rough idea of what that means.

When writing, he indicated that he had developed effective strategies for organising his essays. He described these practices thus:

> Usually, like in English, when I have to write a story, like if I have to write a story, I usually put down like what, I had to write a story on fire and what's it like in a fire or something, and I did, I put it in

> categories, you know, what sounds like and what it looks like and I put it all together and combined it and that was good.

As well, Chris indicated that he had some awareness of the relationship between writing and the clarification of ideas:

> Well, Mum says that, you have to write things down so that it gets into your head because you can read something but you might forget it, and if you write it down then you remember it, because you've written it down and you had to think of what you have to write and so that's...

Chris had been learning to recognise the inherent values in texts and how to read texts with an awareness of these values. Mrs Daniels explained what he had been asked to do:

> Then he had to do newspaper advertising. It went on to newspaper stories and how they twist things around. And then we said things like, I think we had the Commonwealth Games at that stage and disabled athletes and it wasn't until about four or five days we saw the full story of what he did say and then it talked about how they twist it out of context now.

After completing the above activity, Chris was asked to make a tape recorded advertisement. He and his mother laughed a lot as they described the fun they had making this tape together.

Conclusion

Through the discussions jointly constructed by Chris and his mother, as they engage together to find solutions to the problems in Chris's work, he is learning reading and writing practices which go beyond a literal interpretation of the text. Mrs Daniels constantly modifies Chris' s desire to get tasks done as quickly as possible, by enticing him, through discussion, into a more elaborate engagement with the text. These practices are being shaped intuitively by Mrs Daniels through her comfortable relationship with Chris as well as her intrinsic interest in the topics being studied. Mrs Daniels appears to have a powerful interest in learning. The travelling done by the Daniels family has provided Chris with a way of linking school knowledge to the "real" world. In this way, Chris has begun to value information gained from science, social studies, English and Japanese. What counts for Chris is the support and companionship provided by his mother along with the interest in school subjects fostered by his current life experience.

CHAPTER 14
CASE STUDY 8: SOPHIE DANSIE

William Louden

Bradbury is a sheep station of about 100,000 hectares, situated several hundred kilometres inland in the north of Western Australia. It is one of three properties we visited in a long-established pastoral area of Western Australia. All three of these properties were served by the same regional school of the air. Bradbury Station is dry, harsh and beautiful country. As Sophie, the Year 7 student at the centre of this case study described it:

> There hasn't been a lot of rain and it's quite dry around here. What grass there has been, the kangaroos eat, so the sheep don't get a chance to... But when the rains do come you've got wild flowers for miles and everlastings and everything. It's like a carpet of colour over the hills. It's beautiful.

There are six people in Sophie's family, her mother, her father, an older brother and sister who are away at boarding school, and a younger sister, Roberta who is a Year 5 student at the school of the air. Mr and Mrs Dansie bought the station before the children were born, and have steadily been improving the property. They have built a new homestead, surrounded by shady verandahs, lush lawns and tall poinciana trees.

Mr and Mrs Dansie have always lived in rural areas, but neither of them was born to station life. Mrs Dansie grew up in a regional city on the coast. She attended the local high school until Year 11, when she met Mr Dansie. Mr Dansie attended the Catholic school in the inland mining town where he was born but, according to Mrs Dansie, "didn't learn a lot". He did not go away to high school and left the local primary school when he was about fourteen.

Mrs Dansie is a very experienced home tutor. She has been a home tutor for eleven years. She described teaching the children as "my main purpose of being here". Since the first of her children started school, she and Mr Dansie have given school their top priority.

> We both made the decision from the start that school came first and I think you have to do that. You want your child ... to have had the best you can give them.

For this reason, decisions about work on the station always take account of the children's school work. The recent "stragglers" shearing, for example, had been organised around the school holidays so that the children—whose labour

is an essential part of this task—could help without missing any school time. Mrs Dansie appreciates her husband's support when there is a potential conflict between school and work. If necessary, she said, she can say to Mr Dansie, "Sorry, we can't do that. School comes first". Now that her two older children are doing well at high school and her third is almost ready to leave, Mrs Dansie looks on her work as a home tutor as "rewarding":

> Seeing Tom and Katie at high school and coping quite well is rewarding ... When Sophie was in year 2 she won a young writers' competition ... To see them achieve something themselves, that's all rewarding. Its worth the effort that you put into it.

Mrs Dansie's confidence as a home tutor has grown with experience. Remembering her early years, she said:

> When Tom was just starting and I was expecting Roberta, I got all these (distance education sets) and I thought 'Oh dear, I have to educate this child, you know. He doesn't know how to read or write or anything.' It's a daunting task when you first start off but the advice from teachers and, you know, other mums, it all helps.

The most important support she received in those years was from an itinerant teacher who visited the property and told her "you're doing well" and "the kids are doing well". In her own words:

> When Sophie was Year 1, one particular teacher gave me a lot of confidence in what I was doing. She'd taught her own children on correspondence and went on to become a teacher so I felt 'Oh yeah, she knows what I'm going through'. It was good, to get that sort of ... back up, the support you need.

After eleven years teaching, she doesn't often encounter problems with the distance education materials. She has learned from the teachers on home visits, from the home tutor seminars run by the school, from her recollections of her own schooling, and from "just doing it, year after year". Now that the older children are away at high school and making a success of it, she knows she has made an important contribution to her children's education. When Katie went away to school she thanked her mother for getting her up to the standard with all of the other kids. "You're the best teacher I've had Mum," Katie said, and Mrs Dansie thought, "Yes, well I'm the only one!"

Mr and Mrs Dansie see education as partly their responsibility and partly the children's own responsibility. At present, Mrs Dansie is "quite sure they're all doing as well as they can":

> You can only give them the basic primary education, provide for their secondary education and then it's up to them. I'd like them all to go to Year 12 or have a trade or whatever. It's up to them really. Once you've given them the primary education and gone without for them to go to boarding school.

With so much experience of teaching her children, Mrs Dansie believes she has realistic expectations about her children's educational progress:

> Well Tom has always wanted to be a pilot but I don't think his grades are good enough to get into the Air Force or anything like that but at this stage he might go into aircraft engineering—or maintenance—I think it depends. He's going to Perth in August—he'll go to the different institutions, universities and things. Katie is keen on medicine or mining. She wanted to be a paediatrician originally but I think it's nine years study. She's heading in the right direction. She knows what she wants to do. There's no problem there. Sophie always wanted to be a teacher but I don't know. Once again, I'm not going to push them.

Qualifications, they believe, will be especially important for Tom, because they are not sure about the future of station life. Uncertainty about prices, seasons and security of land tenure all hang over the future of the pastoral industry.

Family Literacy Practices

Reading and Writing

Sophie is a keen reader. "If I find a really good book I'll read it and won't be able to put it down. I just like reading," she said. She has "quite a few" books, including C. S. Lewis' Narnia books and Lois Lowry's Anastasia books. She also has "about twelve or thirteen Babysitter books". Her recent reading included several novels by Tim Winton, including *Bugalugs Bum Feet* and *Lockie Leonard* and several novels by Robin Klein, including *Dresses of Red and Gold*. These books came from a variety of sources. In Sophie's words:

> We ask our teachers over the air or we write them a letter and ask them if they can get the books ... They send them out in the mail and sometimes when we go in we buy books from the bookshop.

Mr and Mrs Dansie have less time to read than Sophie.

> At different times of the year you have more time to read. You know, in summer time you sit around and read. It's so hot and so on but in winter time you're out doing something. Gardening, or just getting other things done. And the other thing is at night. You know, the generator goes off when most people like to read, when they're in bed.

Mrs Dansie described herself as "one of those people" who "won't put down" a novel once she starts one, so she mainly restricts her novel reading to holiday times. Mr Dansie "reads all the rural magazines" and they both read newspapers "when we get them", which mainly is when people call through the station on their way from town. Mrs Dansie writes several letters each

week, one to her son, one to her daughter, and one to her mother. She also writes occasional business letters.

In addition to school-related writing and letters to her siblings, friends and grandmother, Sophie has started several large writing projects of her own. These include a novel she started writing at the beginning of the year, and the newsletter for a club she has started with some of the older children at the school of the air:

> My friends and I have a club going and we collect stamps and talk about stamps and we call it "The Gumnut Gang" and I'm the president. I publish a newsletter every month and it's full of competitions and club news and all that and my teacher is really helping us. He's good friends with the postmaster and they have arranged to get us some promotional stuff for Zoo Week. That's in October, like posters and stuff, and it should be really good. We've got about eleven members and we all collect stamps and we're all pretty good friends. It's really good. We collect stamps and raise money for our club and we buy stamps to share around with the club out of the club kitty. My youngest sister is the treasurer and one of my friends is the vice president and her sister is the secretary and I've also got another friend. She's just like a go-between and she helps us whenever we need help and everyone else are members. It's really good. We make certificates up on the computer and print them out and that and it's pretty good and we really enjoy doing what we do and helping the club and it's really fun. We all enjoy stamp collecting and I'm just glad I came up with the idea of the club.

Because Mrs Dansie's work as a home tutor involves her closely in the children's learning, she often provides them with support for their learning outside the formal context of the school room. In the week before we visited her, for example, she had directed Sophie to a reference book to answer a question she had asked, talked to Sophie about the connections between something in a set and her own magazine reading, helped Sophie look up an encyclopaedia, discussed topical issues from television news broadcasts, and played computer games with her.

TV and Computers

Since the school provided the family with a computer four years ago, it has become an important part of home and school activities on Bradbury Station. The first computer arrived when Sophie was in Year 4. She liked the way "you don't have to do a lot of handwriting" and how it is "easy to look through your work". Her language work is sent in to the school at the end of each week using a modem supplied by the school. Sophie is now a confident computer user, which she attributes to her Year 4 teacher who was, she said affectionately, "a computer nut". She liked the way in which the computer allowed her to correct mistakes easily when she was writing, and thought that, after four years working with computers, she was "faster typing than writing".

The school of the air has also provided her with a CD ROM and some educational games. Sophie described her experience of one of these games:

> This term I've been working on a CD program and it's a game and it's called *Mist* and it's been a real puzzler. I've had to do quite a bit of hunting around on all these different worlds for clues and that and it was very difficult but I had a lot of help from a computer expert at distance ed and I finally solved it. I solved it just the other day and I was very pleased with myself. All we had to do is to help this man. He had invented all these worlds by writing them in a book and I had to go around and collect all these clues on how to solve the mystery and how to help him get back his world which his greedy sons had been trying to take over. It was really difficult but I did finally solve it and I'm very pleased with myself.

The family has a satellite dish that receives signals from the ABC and from a commercial network, but television does not play a very big part in the children's lives. Sophie's favourite program is *Home and Away:*

> Normally we watch *Home and Away* at 5.30 and then sometimes we watch the news and if there's a good movie on that night Mum might let us stay up, if it's not a school night, or she'll tape it for us and we can watch it after. But we don't, like, watch a lot of TV, we are normally doing school or working.

Mr and Mrs Dansie watch a few television programs, "probably three or four hours a day":

> I watch the Midday show. The generator goes off then and it goes on again at 5.30. The girls watch *Home and Away* and I do. From 6.00 till 8.00 we watch all the news and *The 7.30 Report*. If something is topical (we watch) *Four Corners*, that sort of thing. Oh, and footy religiously. Not a lot of television, just probably three or four hours a day.

Doing Distance Education

The school room is the central room of one of the old station homesteads on the property. The room, about five metres by six metres in size, is laid out like a regular school room. Along one wall is a row of school-issue tables. On top of one of the tables is the Barrett SSB radio transceiver, an Apple Powerbook lap-top computer, an external CD ROM drive and an ink-jet printer. Under the desk are the batteries used to power the radio transceiver. On the walls there are charts of mathematical tables, parrots, the solar system, common insects, and several anti-smoking posters. Near the entrance to the school room there is a noticeboard area containing several school timetables and a press clipping describing Sophie's older sister's "Young Writers Award" from several years before. The school's term timetable is very explicit, listing the activities in each subject, for each day of term 3. The room also contains some reference books, three well-worn sets of encyclopaedias and a book-case containing about 150

hard-cover novels (Sir Walter Scott's *Kenilworth*, for example). Sophie's corner of the room contains a series of school "Award" cards, awarded by the teachers for science, writing, social studies and so on. There is also a certificate for participation in *The West Australian's* young writers award.

The daily routine of school begins at 7.00 AM, Mondays to Fridays, although it may begin earlier in the hotter months. This is Sophie's account of the weekday routine:

> I start off with my maths and I work until 8.00 AM and then my youngest sister ... does her air lesson and by that time I'm finished maths and I get ready and read what I have to do for language. Then at 9.00 AM we break for a smoko and that goes for half an hour so we come back in at 9.30 AM and after that the motor goes off. Then I get on the computer for language until about a 10.15 AM and then I spend fifteen minutes getting ready for my air lesson at 10.30 AM. That goes for half an hour and it finishes at 11.00 AM and then I spend usually fifteen minutes to half an hour doing my homework from that day, from that air lesson, and then after that I get back on the computer. That's somewhere about 11.15 AM to 11.30 AM and then I work on the computer until midday and then we break for lunch. Lunch normally goes for about an hour and a half and after that we come back in because on Tuesdays my youngest sister has an art lesson at 1.30 PM. I have an art lesson on Wednesday at 1.30 PM so our week days revolve around what happens in the afternoons.
>
> After we're finished school we can do whatever we want. We can read a book or go for a swim or do art and craft or just anything and we do that until the motor goes on at 5.30 PM when we normally watch TV or play with the computer and then at 8.30 PM we go to bed and that's our day. That's our usual week day.

Sophie's Learning

Sophie sees herself as a "pretty good" learner. She especially enjoys mathematics, writing and air lessons. She regards herself as good at problem solving and working independently. As she explained, "I've been working on my own since I was Year 3 because Roberta has to have Mum with her". She also enjoys working on large scale projects. Two of the projects she mentioned enjoying were a family case study and a project on diamond mining. She chose the topic of diamond mining partly because it was interesting and partly because she thought she'd get good information from the company's publicity department:

> SOPHIE: Well we got to choose our own mineral and I chose diamonds and so did another girl and we had to find out information on Argyle and had to write a letter to Argyle and get all this

information and then compile it into a study, a project.

INT: Why did you choose diamonds?

SOPHIE: I'm not sure, it's like pretty fascinating and, you know, it's sort of, makes lots of money and, you know, and they'd have great big good pamphlets and that so you could find lots of information.

The family case study was also interesting, she said, because she did not know much about her background:

> Well it was interesting because I made the family tree, and I found I had a little niece that drowned when she was three, and I never knew, and also learned a lot about where we all came from like Ireland and England and where the first family was and all that. Really interesting. We had to write what our favourite food was and what the family enjoyed and what religion we are and yeah. It was quite fun.

She sees herself as "pretty good" at school work and expects to her work to be marked right "most of the time" when it is returned by her teachers. Sophie carefully considers the written feedback she gets from her teachers, although it usually takes two or three weeks for sets to be returned to her by mail. Turnaround for her language work is quicker because of the modem link to the school of the air. When her work is returned, she looks for mistakes and goes back to the beginning of the activity to check what she did not understand. Sometimes her teacher writes her a letter "saying I've done well or something like that". Awards and stickers sent to her by the school are another important part of the way she finds out how well she is going at school. "I've, all my awards that I've gotten during my schooling years," she said. "Later I'm going to put them in a special file".

After so many years of working with distance education materials, Sophie has well-developed views about what helps her to get through her school work. She finds the easiest materials to use are those which have "no mumbo jumbo" so that she can go "just straight (though), step by step". When she gets stuck, she said, the first thing she does is try to "read between the lines" as her mother has taught her to do.

> Yes, I read through the questions again and then I try and tackle it again ... because sometimes I miss things. Like, say, you read something and you think 'Oh yeah' but it actually says something else.

If re-reading does not work, she asks her mother for help. If her mother is busy with her younger sister, as is often the case, Sophie misses out the difficult activity and comes back to it later:

> Yeah. She actually prefers we do that instead of twiddling our thumbs waiting for her to finish, we could be doing more school work so...

In extreme cases, perhaps "once or twice a term", they might decide to telephone the school to find an explanation for a problem that had been preventing them from finishing the work. These phone calls, however, are restricted to unusual circumstances and "normally the mothers and governesses ring up instead of the children," Sophie said.

Mrs Dansie has also learned a great deal about how to help her children through the task of completing sets. One important element of her method of getting them through the work is a clear set of routines that are very rarely broken. She is almost always present in the school room while the children are working. No matter what the other demands on her time, she is there to help. Sophie could only think of one or two occasions when this rule had been broken, and these days stood out in her memory: "She was over at the shed one time, " she said, "and Roberta and I had to do a day of school work on our own". Considering the many demands on labour that must arise on a station that only employs staff at peak times, this represented a remarkably high level of commitment to helping the children get through their work.

Mrs Dansie sets the routine and also sets high standards for the children.

> I have always tried to maintain that you have it as much like a normal school room or mainstream school as possible. They know that if something's not up to standard I won't be impressed and the only time I will accept something like that is if I know for some reason they've been rushed or sometimes we've done ten days work in six or seven - starting early and finishing late. Things like that I'll accept perhaps not their best effort. You get to know what their best effort is. You say to them "I know that that's not your best".

Technology

At Bradbury Station there is a wide range of technology available to assist the children with their distance learning. The children have daily air lessons, using the tried and true SSB radio technology. (An air lesson is described elsewhere in this case study.) In addition, they have a lap-top computer supplied by the school. Both the children use the computer for a variety of educational purposes and entertainment. Mrs Dansie was impressed at how quickly the children had "picked up" computer use. She too, had become comfortable with using the computer and had found a few business and household tasks it could help her with. She attributed the success of computer use among school of the air families to "the way school has introduced it", but acknowledged that there are "a few families where the mums won't have anything to do with it". She had her own reservations about the computer. "The computer is all well and good," she said, "but its important for them to keep their handwriting skills up to scratch". One of the technological resources which she

found less useful was the educational television programs broadcast by the Distance Education Centre. She was aware, for example, of a program called *Live Science* but chose not to have the children watch it:

> We've never really watched *Live Science*. It's available here. If the school were to say you should watch such and such we probably would get it. We've got a publication there with the weekly programs. I'm in such a routine now that anything like that puts me out and I think "if they watch an hour of *Live Science* it's an hour you've got to do in the afternoon or something".

Mrs Dansie said that she would be much more likely to make use of television programs if they were structured into the sets her children were doing. This had been the case, she said, with some computing programs which had been integrated into sets.

Sophie's Air Lesson

One of the most important elements of Sophie's school day is her air lesson, broadcast from the school in the regional centre 400 kms away. The air lesson described below is a science lesson on the topic of weather. The teacher's plan for the lesson was recorded on the school's standard air-lesson sheet. This sheet, filled in by the class teacher on his computer, contains the lesson plan, a class roll and a tally of how many times each child was invited to speak during the air lesson. The lesson plan included the following steps:

1. Follow up from last week's lesson. Discussion of answers to a sample of questions from pages 7-9 in the book. Children take turns.

2. Discussion of recordings of maximum temperature. Children give their average so far.

3. Weather map discussion page 10 and sample weather map (A3 sheet folded in the kit). Go through the different parts of the map numbered 1-7.

4. Choose sample areas in Australia and ask the children what the weather is like now and will be the following day (ie. wind speed, strength, rain and special attention to two tropical lows in the north).

5. Discussion about seasons. What season is it for the February map? What differences would we notice in July? (The fronts will have moved north and the lows over the tropics will move over the equator).

6. Time permitting give a weather forecast that might be broadcast with this, as on TV. (Not homework).

Air lessons begin with a greeting, a description of the materials the children require for the lesson, and a few minutes music while the children get ready for the lesson. The opening section of Sophie's science lesson appears in the transcript below:

TEACHER: Good morning Year 7s. Today you'll need your Year Book for science as well as your kit, your weather maps from your kit. Okay, talk to you shortly, some music first. *(Music, 2 minutes)* Good morning once again Year 7s. And we have a science weather lesson today and let's just check our roll and see if everybody is out there this morning. First of all to you Sophie. How are you Sophie? Any news for us today, over?

SOPHIE: Good morning Mr Hay and everyone else and I'm very well thank you. I've got some news here today and how are you, over?

TEACHER: Oh, I'm pretty good and, ah, go ahead with your news Sophie, over.

SOPHIE: Oh well yesterday (the school principal) and Bill came out for a bit of a home visit and yesterday afternoon we went out to the old homestead and looked around for odds and ends for my archaeology project, and then we went down the river and we started, and we did some archery and I was the only one that close to the target. I got the red bit next to the centre over.

TEACHER: Close to the bull's eye, over. Roberta was telling me about it this morning. ... And Mike how are you this morning? Have you any news for us today Mike, over?

MIKE: Good morning Mr Hay and everyone else and I haven't got any news for you today.

TEACHER: Okay Mike, thanks and let's go to Andy. And how are you this morning, Andy? Do you any news for us today, over?

ANDY: Good morning Mr Hay and everyone else and no, I haven't got any news either, over.

TEACHER: Okay, thanks Andy. Let's go to Trish. And Trish. do you have any news for us today, over?

TRISH: Good morning Mr Hay and no I haven't got any news for you. I've got a question, over.

TEACHER: Go ahead Trish, over.

TRISH: Was that music you played by any chance, The Black Sorrows, over?

TEACHER: Oh you've got a very good ear Trish. It was from an album, *Better Times*, and actually the song was

called Better Times. Did you like that song did you Trish, over?

TRISH: Yes, and I've heard, I think you played it in the background yesterday, over.

For each child, the same ritual was repeated: welcome, a question about news, and some small personal comment addressed to the child. The teacher then checked to see that children all had the book open on the right page and he began working through the activities they were supposed to have completed in the activity book. The next section of the lesson went like this:

TEACHER: I'll ask you Sophie, you might have done this. Have you done pages 7 to 9 after those questions Sophie about different weather forecasts for different days, over?

SOPHIE: Yes I have, over.

TEACHER: Okay. Has anyone not done that yet, over? Okay what I'll do, we'll just quickly run through that and I'll just ask different people what different answers that they had for that. On the first page on Lesson One on page 7 and it said the forecast was going to be 42, fine and hot with gusty easterly, extreme fire danger and outlook continuing hot and the current temperature 29, when you first wake up in the morning. So it's pretty hot. Describe the clothes you'd wear for that one. I'll work up the roll this time. Describe the clothes you'd wear for a day like that, over.

The book provides space for students to write a series of two-line responses to questions such as "having heard the forecast, describe the clothes you would wear". One by one, moving up the roll from the bottom of the list, the teacher asked each child a question. When the questions listed in the text had been answered, the teacher asked whether any of the class had any answers that were "unusual or that you'd like to inform us about". Sophie responded by reading out two of her answers, and the teacher added some detail of his own. He then indicated that the class should turn to the next page in their books, and said that he would go through the next set of questions from "the top of the roll". By the time it was Sophie's turn again, the question in the text was, "How do other members of your family react when it has been raining non-stop for two weeks?"

SOPHIE: Well unfortunately this has never happened to us and we'd feel perfect, over.

TEACHER: I was going to say I bet it's never happened out there. What's the most rain you've ever had, days in a row, over?

MRS DANSIE: (*Who is sitting listening in to the air lesson, says to Sophie*) That heavy rain.

SOPHIE: Oh well, we had that heavy rain, overnight we got a hundred and sixteen mls, over.

On a content level, this lesson on weather patterns could be mistaken for a very simple set of learning activities. The tasks in the science set are not very complex for Year 7 students: presumably, much younger children than Sophie actually know what it is like when it is hot for a long time or wet for a long time. Moreover, the students in this class had already completed the task in writing before the air lesson began. But to focus on the content of the lesson alone would be to miss much of what was important about the air lesson as a support for distance learning.

One of the things missing in the bald transcript of the air lesson is what the children who were *not* speaking were doing. As the teacher worked his way up and down the roll asking questions, Sophie listened intently, giving the answers to the questions aloud to herself and her mother. Later in the lesson, for example, when the teacher asked Holly "What is happening in Darwin?", Sophie answered to herself, "Raining". Similarly, when the teacher asked "Does anyone know what wind speed is measured in?" Sophie turned to Mrs Dansie and said "Kilometres?" Mrs Dansie shook her head as if to say, "No". Sophie then suggested "Knots?" and Mrs Dansie nodded. When Sophie knew she had the right answer, she pressed the talk button on the microphone, but was not called on to answer. When it was Sophie's turn to respond on air, she rehearsed the answer with Mrs Dansie before committing herself. For example, when the teacher asked the question, "Who makes the weather forecast, Sophie?", Sophie looked at Mrs Dansie and asked "Bureau of Meteorology?" When Mrs Dansie nodded, Sophie turned back to the transceiver and gave the same answer to the teacher.

A second element of the air lesson obscured by a transcript of the teacher's question and answer session is the social context of the air lesson. Sophie regards all of the other children in her class as friends and she listens carefully to what they have to say. Even though the air lesson is structured around a set of two-way communications between the teacher and individual children, the experience of participating in the air lesson is very similar to participation in a regular class. To sit in the school room beside a student doing air lessons was to look in on a virtual classroom. Through the ebb and flow of the conversation an imaginary classroom was created in the air. It felt real enough to touch. While air lessons were on, everyone in the room listened in and followed the conversation. For Sophie, it was quite clear that she was not just having a two-way conversation with her teacher. "The whole class is there, definitely," she said. Air lessons were more interesting, she thought, than regular work on the sets and they taught her "a lot more than you would if you just read a book or something":

> If you're on (the regular distance education program) you don't see your teacher and you don't hear the teacher and you don't see all

your other classmates unless you go on camp, and that's kind of like you're in, you're isolated but when you've got the radio you don't feel so isolated.

Language Lessons

After the end of her air lesson, Sophie returned to her desk and took out the materials for her language lesson for the day. While she did this, Roberta worked on her language activities, using the computer. Sophie's first task was to write a book review of the Tim Winton novel *Lockie Leonard*. She also had a copy of the text *Language Checkpoints 4* open in front of her. Responding to one of the instructions in *Language Checkpoints*, Sophie tried to work out where the novel was set. Unable to work it out, she turned to Mrs Dansie and asked for help:

MRS DANSIE: Where do you think it's set?

SOPHIE: I'm not sure. It's somewhere outside Perth. They've said that.

Mrs Dansie picked up the book and spent about a minute looking for the name of the country town. Sophie waited for her. Unable to find the location, Mrs Dansie said: "Just leave it". While Sophie continued writing, Mrs Dansie looked for the name of the town in the book. Ten minutes later, she handed the book back to Sophie. She had not found out the name of the place, but her quick scan of the book had reminded her of her son, away at boarding school:

MRS DANSIE: Actually Tom probably would have enjoyed that.

SOPHIE: Yes, and Katie wanted to read it.

MRS DANSIE: Oh, she can get it from the school library.

SOPHIE: Yes.

While Sophie continued working through the instructions for writing her book review, Mrs Dansie moved over to the computer, where Roberta was ready for the dictation section of her language work. Mrs Dansie sat behind Roberta and read out the dictation exercise while Roberta typed it on to the computer.

MRS DANSIE: Dictation. Hercules proved his strength by catching the bull alive and returned it to the King. He showed that he was a clever thinker when he used the river to clean his saddles. Hercules proved his strength.

ROBERTA: Her..cu..les. Did you say proved?

MRS DANSIE: Proved.

ROBERTA: Proo..(*pause 15 seconds*) Hard.

MRS DANSIE: Find it, come on. Proved, like moved.

ROBERTA: Is that it ... it there?

MRS DANSIE: Yeah, proved. Proved his strength. Come on, hurry up.

ROBERTA: (*pause 10 seconds*) Is it GH?

MRS DANSIE: Yes, G, by capturing the bull..cap..turing. Find it.

As this section of transcript shows, Roberta's attention was split between remembering the words in the dictation, working out how to spell them, and typing the letters on the keyboard. Mrs Dansie helped her with all three sub-skills. She repeated the word "proved" when Roberta missed it. She waited patiently for fifteen seconds - a long time in the context of dictation - while Roberta tried to work out how the word would finish ("proo..."). When Roberta acknowledged that she was having trouble ("hard"), Mrs Dansie gave a hint ("proved, like moved"), and then applied some pressure for Roberta to work a little faster ("Come on, hurry up"). Perhaps a little frustrated by Roberta's slow search for the letters on the keyboard, which mirrored Roberta's difficulty in spelling "proved" and "strength", Mrs Dansie seemed to will Roberta's fingers locate the key for the next letters in each word ("Find it, come on" .... "Find it").

When Sophie had spent about 30 minutes on her book review, Mrs Dansie asked her to move on to the next section of her day's language work. "Where's the book you do your language in?" she said. "I want you to start your language now". Mrs Dansie turned to *Language Checkpoints*, p. 50, which was headed "Checkpoint 3. Words, Phrases and Clauses". As Roberta's dictation session drew to a close Mrs Dansie asked, "Do you know what to do?" Sophie moved over to the computer and began working through the set of exercises in the text. The first exercise took the following form:

Words, phrases and clauses

1. Improve these sentences by adding words, phrases and clauses. The first one is done for you.

a) Lightning lit up the sky.
Suddenly, flashes of wild lightning lit up the darkened sky from horizon to horizon. (Italics in original)

After a few minutes work, Sophie asked Mrs Dansie for help on question 1(c). Mrs Dansie read over her shoulder and gave a hint ("I'd have put something like ..."). Mrs Dansie walked back to where Roberta was working and, when she returned a few minutes later, she found Sophie re-formatting the graphics on the page. "Don't spend all of your time fiddling with that," she said. Sophie worked through the set of five sentence building activities in the first activity until she reached activity 1(e), which read:

e) The farmer, seated on his machine, moves over the land.

At this point Sophie asked Mrs Dansie for help with question 1 (e). Looking over Sophie's shoulder, Mrs Dansie read the activity while Sophie explained what she thought she had to do:

SOPHIE: You're supposed to add words to the sentence.

MRS DANSIE: Right, so, mmm. (*Reading*) Well, what would he be doing?

SOPHIE: Ploughing.

MRS DANSIE: Ploughing the paddock or something. You might even be able to sort of say what the man was like.

Having solved the problem with Mrs Dansie's help, Sophie was able to complete the first set of activities. The instruction for the next set of exercises in *Language Connections* read as follows:

2. Make these sentences more interesting by adding what is required in the blank spaces.

a) The shearer__adjectival clause___lay on the floor of the shanty.

When Sophie read this instruction she was not clear about what she had to do, so she asked for Mrs Dansie's help again:

SOPHIE: Listen, Mum, I don't understand what they mean here.

MRS DANSIE: (*Silence. Reads instructions in the text.*) Right, you have to sort of, add an adjective. Well what's an adjective?

SOPHIE: What is it?

MRS DANSIE: What is an adjective?

SOPHIE: It's a describing word.

MRS DANSIE: Yeah, that's right, so you have to have a clause, an adjectival clause. Right, that's a describing word.

At this point, Mrs Dansie looked to the school of the air guidelines for language sets 11-15, which directed students to refer back to previous work from *Language Checkpoints*. Mrs Dansie and Sophie turned to the pages mentioned in the guidelines and tried to work out what to do:

MRS DANSIE: (*Reading aloud*) 'Quickly begins with the word quick', 'other words which begin adjectival clauses are to, that and who.' Lay on the floor of the shed. Why would he be laying on the floor?

At this point in the lesson the school of the air principal, who was travelling with the researcher, returned from a home visit to another station. "This one's for you," Mrs Dansie said, drawing the principal into the discussion about adjectival clauses and adverbial phrases. While Mrs Dansie went off to prepare lunch, the principal worked through the activity with Sophie:

PRINCIPAL: You know when I was at primary school Sophie, one of the many things that I failed and I hated, was adjectival clauses and phrases and adverbial phrases. It had no meaning for me at all. (*Reading*) 'It lit up the darkened sky from horizon to horizon.' ... So you've done all those ones and you're up to 2B. (inaudible) shearer, and you know the difference between adjectives. You know what adjectives are? What do they do?

SOPHIE: Ah they, they describe things.

PRINCIPAL: Describe the word. It's going to tell how he lay on the floor of the shanty. And adverbial is going to add meaning to the verb, that's going to tell how he did something. So this one's going to describe how he lay, I mean it could be an adverbial one too but he might have, the shearer might have collapsed exhausted after work and lay on the shanty floor.

SOPHIE: Oh, I thought it was something different.

PRINCIPAL: Now let me just check that that's right. 'The small pup was carried in a billy', adjectival clause and an adverbial phrase, so it might be, it'll add information, and adjective, describing word, with how he was carrying it and what the billy was like. An adverbial one is how he may have behaved or how he might have sat and they might be (inaudible). It'll tell you how he did something. He might have been whimpering or he might have been excited or he might have been sleepy so really one's just a verb, and one's an adjective but it's in a clause, you know, a whole phrase. How did he hatch the dragon? Adjectival phrase, clause, I should say 'looking ready to eat his first lunch' or 'hungrily eyeing off the chooks', or something.

SOPHIE: (*laughs*)

Many of the conditions of distance education teaching and learning are evident in these language lessons. These children's lessons take place in a class of two, in the context of existing family relationships. Mrs Dansie was much more aware of what each of the children was doing at any moment that a teacher of

25 or 30 children in a regular classroom could be, and more able to put time into supporting each of them. Few children in regular classrooms, for example, would have one-to-one support to complete their dictation each day. A second and equally important difference from a regular classroom is that there was no separation between family and school relationships. For example, Mrs Dansie's quick search for the setting of *Lockie Leonard* did not reveal the place name, but it did remind her of her two children away at boarding school. It occurred to her that Tom would have liked the book. She shared this feeling with Sophie, who added a thought about Katie, and they consoled themselves that Katie could read the book "from the school library".

Mrs Dansie also seemed to act in familiar teachers' roles, such as the role of timekeeper. She told the children when to start activities ("I want you to start your language now"); checked that they understood the instructions ("Do you know what to do?"); monitored whether they were making sufficient progress to justify the time being spent ("Come on, hurry up"; "find it, come on"; "don't spend all of your time fiddling with that".); and she told them when it was acceptable to proceed without completing a task that had been set ("Just leave it").

Alongside this familiar classroom teachers' role, Mrs Dansie acted as a problem-solver when the children were unable to follow instructions in their distance education texts. Sometimes she gave hints ("I'd have put something like ..."), just as a class teacher might if she were walking past a student who looked confused. At other times, Mrs Dansie became involved in trying to figure out what might have been in the minds of the teachers who designed the activities the children were trying to complete. This was particularly evident in the struggle she and Sophie had trying to understand what was involved in the exercise on adjectival clauses and adverbial phrases. Her first strategy was to read the instruction aloud. Next, she asked a question which took them both back through the material they already knew and which may been relevant ("What is an adjective?" "A describing word".). When this strategy left them without understanding the relationship between the known (adjective) and the unknown (adjectival clause) she went back to the lesson guidelines provided by the school. This strategy seemed about to be successful ("Why would he be laying on the floor?"), when the arrival of the principal enabled her to find out more directly what might have been in the minds of the teachers who set the work.

Mrs Dansie applied a range of problem-solving strategies as she tried to make the distance education texts come to life and yield a meaning that would allow Sophie to complete the activity. Her strategies, however, were quite different from those adopted by the principal. His first reaction to Sophie's confusion was to say that when he was at school such activities had "no meaning" for him. This statement is encoded as a personal anecdote about himself as a child, but presumably also meant that as a teacher he did not regard adjectival and adverbial clauses as useful knowledge. Nevertheless, he was able to provide an elaborated and amusing explanation without having to search for meaning in the lifeless text. As a teacher, he seemed empowered to act as a critic of the text and the activity. Confronted by problems in the distance education texts,

Mrs Dansie was less inclined to ascribe the problem to the construction of the text or the task, as she searched for the resources to complete the grammar exercises. Similarly, she spent ten minutes trying to find out the name of the town in which *Lockie Leonard* was set, because the instructions in the text book seemed to require the name of the place. Had the teachers who planned the lesson been present in the school room, they would probably have been equally satisfied with Sophie's first response ("It's somewhere outside Perth".).

Conclusion

Sophie does her school work in a well-organised school room under the experienced eye of her mother, who has been a home tutor for eleven years. The school day is clearly structured and works to a timetable that is varied only in exceptional cases. Sophie's mother tries to operate the school room " as much like a normal school ... as possible" and sets high standards for her children. Sophie is a keen reader and writer, who sees herself as a "pretty good" learner. She has become an accomplished computer user in the three years since the school provided the family with a computer and modem. Sophie looks forward to her daily air lessons, which she regards as more useful for learning than "if you just read a book". She is well organised for air lessons and very attentive to the voices of her friends and the teacher. While other children are speaking, she gives her own answers aloud to her mother, and she rehearses answers with her mother before she speaks on the radio.

Sophie has clear ideas about working with distance education materials. She prefers materials with no "mumbo jumbo" that she can work through "step by step". When she is stuck she tries to "read between the lines" to discover if she has missed something on her first reading. Failing that, she moves on to the next task and waits for her mother to have time to assist her. When her mother has time, the two of them work through the text together. They seem to presume that confusion over the meaning of a task or text will be able to be overcome if they are thorough about their search through the distance education text resources they have. They contact the school only "once or twice a term" to find explanations for problems that prevent them from finishing the work. These calls are usually made by Sophie's mother. Mrs Dansie has a well-developed set of roles as a home tutor. She has a wide range of problem-solving strategies. Sometimes she responds to material personally, as Sophie's mother, and sometimes she works along side the child as a co-learner, using textual strategies refined by years of trying to bring to life the silent texts supplied by the school.

CHAPTER 15
CASE STUDY 9: WILLIAM DOUGLAS

Judith Rivalland

I was most relieved when I eventually caught sight of the house at Willow Creek. Although Dr Douglas had given very thorough directions about how to get there, the 70 km track from the bitumen wandered through isolated countryside and appeared to be used infrequently. Two houses came into sight as I turned the corner, so I drove up to the first house where I found Dr Douglas waiting for me. Apparently she lived in the other house so she jumped into the Land Rover in order to show me the way. When we pulled up at the door, Mia, her six year old daughter, was standing at the door. With a laugh, Dr Douglas commented on the fact that Mia was supposed to be doing her school work. However, William, her twelve year old son, was busily engaged in his studies.

Dr Douglas grew up in the Pilbara, where her father was a mine manager. She went to boarding school in Perth when she was ten years old and eventually completed a medical degree at the University of Western Australia. After finishing an internship at one of the major public hospitals, she studied in China where she gained a medical qualification in acupuncture. She practised medicine in Perth for some time but she enjoys working in Aboriginal communities so has been drawn back to the north by work in the Kimberley. Mr Terry, her partner and the father of William and Mia, is the son of a Yugoslav migrant family. He grew up in New South Wales where he completed high school and then trained as an electrician. He worked for some time as a shot firer for movie and TV productions and now works as a sculptor.

The family owns a house in Fremantle but much prefers to live in the Kimberley. Having decided they enjoyed the Kimberley lifestyle, they went into partnership with two other couples to buy Willow Creek. They wanted to be self-sufficient and get away from city life. Although they do stock some cattle, they have chosen to live at Willow Creek for the lifestyle rather than for its potential economic value. They like the environment in which they live but have found things haven't worked out with their partners, so they will probably sell the property when they get a chance. Dr Douglas spends about six months of the year doing locums for doctors in the different local communities, while Mr Terry has spent most of the time converting an existing building into their home. Sometimes Dr Douglas takes one or both of the children with her when she does locums. At other times she leaves them with Mr Terry. Both parents share the duties of supervising the children's distance education program, although Dr Douglas does most of the supervision of William and Mr Terry tends to help Mia. When she is at home,

Dr Douglas is usually the primary supervisor. Dr Douglas has a wealth of local knowledge about the Kimberley gained from travelling and working as a medical locum in a range of communities. She feels she can learn from those people who have had most experience with the distance education system, so she keeps in touch with other parents who have children studying through it. Mr Terry was away for the week in which I visited William, so the information about William's schooling was all provided by Dr Douglas.

Mr Terry has built a modest home which contains two main rooms. There is a large lounge/kitchen/dining area which contains most of the storage, home made open shelves and a table and two bench seats. Dr Douglas has a large filing cabinet in this area in which all of her records and the children's completed work is kept. The other room is separated into two bedrooms by a set of shelves which serve the dual function of providing storage space for the family's clothes. There is a solar panel which runs the refrigerator and provides limited electricity for lighting. A 32 volt generator must be started each evening in order to provide electricity and to pump water for the storage tank. Toilet and bathroom facilities are available in the other house about 300 metres away. There is a small unused TV in the house, so William and Mia usually go to their neighbours to watch the children's programs, when the electricity is turned on each evening. Although Dr Douglas feels it is important for the children to have access to a computer it can only be used when the generator is operating. Dr Douglas spends a lot of time maintaining a garden in which there are tropical fruits and a range of vegetables. Keeping the garden alive is very time consuming as water is scarce and the plants are badly effected by the intense heat.

While Dr Douglas and Mr Terry enjoy life at Willow Creek, William is ambivalent about their isolated life. He enjoys some dimensions of it but also misses many aspects of city life, particularly having access to video games and other adolescent entertainments. "I'm probably a video game whiz. I can beat a computer, I can beat a video game," he said. He also misses other children of his own age. Unlike many children who live in such isolation there is no agricultural work for him to participate in once he has completed his schooling for the day. In many ways, school work provides William with a way of filling in his time, so he feels no pressure to rush through his work and quite frequently works into the late afternoon. On the other hand Mia, appears to thrive on the unfettered life style and finds it difficult to settle down to sustained school work. She has spent her pre-school years free to explore the surrounding bushland. The family often spend time together exploring the nearby river or fishing and swimming.

Aspirations

Dr Douglas did not seem to have any clear sense of which occupations William and Mia may take up. She is hopeful they will complete Year 12 and have access to a university education if that is their wish. She feels it is important for them to have the option of university entrance open to them even though they may not wish to exercise that option. She doesn't think William is likely to live in the country and when he begins high school he will go to Perth to board at

Scotch College. She feels Mia may choose a different life style depending on her primary school results. She would like the children to choose a career which would be useful to other people.

William seems to have replaced the companionship of his city friends with a rich imaginary life. On occasions he made different suggestions about his aspirations for the future. They were mostly tied to making lots of money, but for different reasons. At one point he explained, "I want to become a rich businessman and then leave all the national reserves, buy lots of national reserves and put up security guards around the place (so people couldn't destroy them)". However, to the disapproval of his mother, he went on to role play how he would like to be the president and run all of the country he owned:

> Yeah, and if I actually buy the state, which is my ambition, buy some country, and then I'll be president (*laughs*) 'Oh I own everything. 'How can you be president? I want to be president, I own everything' (*in a funny voice*). Buy some tiny little country and then say, 'Now I own everything and you don't own anything, so I'm president, so there, mm, I'm king.' I've been reading too much

In another conversation, which arose in the context of his English lesson, he described how he would like to be an astronaut:

WILLIAM:	I heard that astronauting was quite an interesting job, because you're out floating in space and seeing all the stars close, landing on the moon and holding rocks.
INT:	Is that what you want to do when you leave ...
WILLIAM:	Yeah, I want to become an astronaut on some ship and then, I want to, I don't know if the astronauts get well paid ..... yeah, and then start, buy a few small businesses with that money after I've bought a house and a, and a car or two, and then, and then when I retire, and then when I'm about 40 or so I'll quit the astronauting and start businesses up and think about buying businesses, and work my way up to become a really big businessman.
INT:	What sort of businesses would you like?
WILLIAM:	I don't know. Buy factories all around the place. Arnott's business, biscuits. And BP. I don't know about BP any more though, (inaudible).

William appears to be ambivalent about the values of his mother and sometimes suggested he would prefer a more affluent lifestyle, although he clearly has great admiration for his mother's knowledge and expertise.

Family Literacy Practices

Reading

William is an avid reader. He "reads a heap. I read about a book every night. A whole book a night, I'm a pretty fast reader". He likes to read "fairy tales and books about ancient Egypt. I like to read about the ancient Mediterranean cultures. I'm very interested". He has recently finished reading *The Steps Up the Chimney* part of a quartet derived from *The Magician's House.* Although he quite often visits the public library when he goes to town, he mainly gets his books from the distance education library because it is too difficult to return books to the public libraries. William has the perception that he is a good reader: "I think I'm excellent at reading, because I read a whole heap. (*funny voice*) 'Practice makes perfect'. He expressed amazement at how difficult some children find it is to learn to read:

WILLIAM:	Some kids can't read for years and years and years. They find it really hard to learn to read.
INT:	Yeah.
WILLIAM:	I reckon that's weird. I found it easy as clicking my fingers.
INT:	How old were you when you started to learn to read?
WILLIAM:	I read a whole story when I was only seven years old.

Dr Douglas regularly reads the most recent medical journals because she feels it is important to keep up with all of the latest knowledge in the field. On the other hand, her life is so busy coping with the children's school work and helping with things around the farm, she rarely has time to read novels. Dr Douglas or Mr Terry usually read to Mia before she goes to bed each night. Mr Terry keeps an art diary which is a set of notes and sketches. William enjoys art and often does some art with his father when school is finished.

Writing

About once a month on a regular basis, the children and Dr Douglas all write letters to their relatives. Dr Douglas keeps all of the company books for their business partnership. In order to sit exams to keep her medical registration up to date, Dr Douglas systematically studies and writes reports. William enjoys writing stories but gets frustrated by his lack of speed. "With a typewriter it'd be no problem because I'm rather quick with my fingers. I'm just not very good at writing neat and fast".

Television and Computers

Dr Douglas is pleased it is not possible to watch very much television at Willow Creek. This is one aspect of the lifestyle which she really enjoys. When they were living in Perth she found Mr Terry "would watch anything. In fact

he doesn't actually watch it, he turns it on for the noise". William either had the television or computer on every afternoon after school when they lived in town. She tried to make him pick one program and just watch that, but she found it difficult to enforce if his father insisted on having the television turned on. Since they have moved to Willow Creek, William usually watches *Captain Planet* and some of the family comedies. He still sometimes likes to watch *Sesame Street* and *Play School*.

On medical grounds, she was very concerned about the amount of time William had previously spent playing video games, because she believes it makes him hyperactive and easily frustrated: "it would permeate all of his life". She explained this as follows:

> It's an adrenalin rush thing. Sue was telling me she saw him down at Long's store and they've got sort of a little arcade there, and she was watching Will. He was watching someone else playing and she thought he was having an epileptic fit because he was twitching, you know, and he used to have some behavioural disorders from it too. You know like he would, used to get angry very easily.

Since moving to Willow Creek the family spend much of their time playing board games instead of watching television. William has transferred his passion for computer games to playing Monopoly and Battleships. His mother said, "He loves Monopoly, money's a big thing for him".

Doing Distance Education

William and Mia work in their shared bedroom. Both the children's beds are placed along one wall. Each bed has a mosquito net held up by a pole from which some of Mia's school charts are hung. William has a large desk and chair on one side of the room whereas Mia has a very small desk and chair on the other side. William keeps his school materials stored in a box cum trunk next to his desk. He has a tape recorder, dictionary, maths basic facts dictionary and a science encyclopedia all sitting on his desk. Dr Douglas has bought him the maths dictionary and science encyclopedia because she felt he needed additional resources to those provided by distance education. Life in William's classroom moves around him at a hectic rate. Mia has begun Year 1 this year and is still having trouble maintaining concentration. She is a charming child who often demands attention either from Dr Douglas or William. In addition, Dr Douglas must attend to the watering, household chores and some of the farm duties. She rushes between meeting Mia's demands, to changing hoses, feeding animals and preparing meals. The following transcript from a recording of morning school, provides some idea of the competing demands placed on Dr Douglas. Dr Douglas is helping Mia with her reading and writing while William talks aloud about his own work:

> DR DOUGLAS: It goes there, the room is...
> MIA: Small.

DR DOUGLAS: And then it says, ah, ah, ah (inaudible). Mia, no you don't do that.

MIA: (inaudible)

WILLIAM: It's terribly messy.

MIA: (inaudible) A.

DR DOUGLAS: No, where's the dot that says a.

MIA: There.

DR DOUGLAS: Right okay, so you...

WILLIAM: It's time to get out of my clothes (*whistles*).

DR DOUGLAS: Right, you can do it. There it is. Yes, that's right and the two rockets?

MIA: Yep.

DR DOUGLAS: Do those. You can colour that in.

MIA: (inaudible)

DR DOUGLAS: Alright then.

William appeared to have good concentration and usually worked on regardless of the conversations between Dr Douglas and Mia. He has found all sorts of interesting ways to entertain himself, one of which is to talk in different accents about fantasy happenings created around some obscure aspect of the text on which he works. One example of this is shown in the following monologue recorded during a maths activity. He was beginning a maths lesson in which he was required to find the total of the angles of each quadrilateral on the previous page, by tracing the shapes of each angle onto grid paper, cutting out each angle and then gluing it on to a 360 degree plane, so that he would discover that the four angles of a quadrilateral add up to 360 degrees. Notice how the monologue does not appear to have any direct relevance to the task:

WILLIAM: Well, yesterday I started page 9 with page 14.

INT: Oh right.

WILLIAM: This is America. (inaudible) the second, only a dollar...

MIA: Rabbit catch this (inaudible).

DR DOUGLAS: (inaudible)

WILLIAM: (*in Mexican accent*) 13, 14, 15. Ah. How much money? How much you want? Okay. Cross the border. What does he make? Feels lovely to have thirteen dollars and twenty five cents. And another sixteen at the most. Ha ha. (inaudible). Well, well well what have we here? Hi, I'm looking for my family. (Inaudible) in, you know what.

MIA: He's not (inaudible).

WILLIAM:	Yeah but you wait kid, remember what they said and I quote, 'Opportunity never (inaudible) but, but, but it (inaudible) but, but, but, but, but.
MIA:	But, but...
WILLIAM:	But opportunity is guarantied and (inaudible) you well. Heh trust me, mm, mm, mm mm. Hey trust me.

Nevertheless, without much concern for time, William completed his activities successfully as he worked and entertained himself. He expected little of his mother's attention because he realises that most of the time she needs to work with Mia. He is very patient with Mia, only occasionally getting annoyed with her.

Organisation

William is very responsible about getting on with his school work. He usually starts work as soon as he gets up and has eaten his breakfast. As he explained, "I woke up this morning and Mum was down at the paddock, so I just have my breakfast and pull on my clothes, walk down to see that Paul is there, you know, the big truck, and then I came down and started on my work". He plans his timetable and organises his work himself. He usually spends half of the morning on maths and the other half on English, and then he works on health, art and social studies in the afternoons. At the time I visited, he had completed all of his science so he did not need to include this in his planning. He prefers to work on one of the afternoon subjects until he completes the required work for two weeks and then he moves on to the next subject. He enjoys working in this way because he can concentrate better. During morning and afternoon breaks, he often checks his work with Dr Douglas and completes any of the work which is to be discussed with his home tutor. William played a maths game, explained a maths activity and did a spelling test with his mother at morning or afternoon break time while I was visiting. William has developed self-regulatory practices which enable him to complete his work without close supervision. However, his mother checks all of his work before it is sent to the teacher.

Getting Things Right

The very successful academic career of Dr Douglas has given her the confidence to have opinions about schooling which may not match with the pedagogic basis of some of the materials. She has a classical view of learning based on knowing the facts of the canonised texts of her own education. So she is anxious to ensure that William attains such knowledge. She checks through his work books before they are sent back to the school teacher and tends to correct any information which is inaccurate. When William complained about having to be so accurate with his work, particularly spelling, she responded by saying, "Would space shuttles get off the ground if engineers were not precise?" She often tests William on some of the knowledge contained in his work because she feels it is important to train his memory:

> But there's none of this memory training in there. There's no memory training at all. He can just look it up in the book and write it down. And so there's none of that concentration, you know, those skills to teach memory. I mean the only way you can do it is with games. I mean he likes the Battleships and so on, although that's even not really memory. (inaudible) And that is important because when you sit exams at university you still have to use your memory. You still have to remember, doesn't really. If you haven't got the right facts in your head you can't pass the exam and they're not, there's none of this teaches any of that memory.

Materials

Dr Douglas feels the English and maths programs are "okay, but it doesn't provide for children that might be more intelligent. You know like the academic extension system". However she feels the social studies course is out of date:

> And, you know, when you get a distance education program that says you know, 'The first settlers arrived in 1788', even now, it's an insult and, you know, they told me that it was funding. Well I can't see why they can't have a little piece of paper in place to say that the book's old and, you know, we really do understand that Aboriginal people have settled the continent, you know, at least forty thousand years before. You know, they could just write a disclaimer in there, they don't have to spend lots of money to do that.

She has some concerns about the science program because it is not rigorous enough in pushing the children to understand a systematic view of science:

> Well he had one which was sort of weather, where he was supposed to make a barometer using a piece of hair, which of course doesn't work up in the tropics (*laughs*). Works in Perth. And he had to sort of plot the weather and that was okay and then, what was the other thing you did for science? You did the stuff about weighing iceblocks and that was sort of one of the matter things but it was only using pretty much, I mean they did oil as well. But they were trying to get them to see that different substances froze at different temperatures and melted at different temperatures which I really thought was a bit more advanced than doing something simple like this.

Dr Douglas also felt the emphasis on interpersonal relationships in health education was difficult for isolated primary students to understand when they have had no experience of the complexity of adolescent relationships:

> DR DOUGLAS: Well one of them was. They had had one program on adolescence and they were talking a

lot about, they did talk about sort of the physical changes in adolescence and then they were trying to talk about the emotional and mental changes in adolescence but for kids that live in an isolated area, you know, the relationship between kids in groups in playgrounds really does not apply and Will couldn't understand a lot of that. It really wasn't anything that he had any relationship to.

INT: I was just wondering though if they, if kids are moving out of this setting, like he's going to be going to another place whether it's still not important for them to have some of that.

DR DOUGLAS: Yeah, yeah that's right, I suppose it provides good discussion for him. Mm.

INT: Yes and so it might...

DR DOUGLAS: But there's probably other ways of writing about it other than relating it to other kids and, you know, adolescent activities. Like one thing they had there which was a real scream was, you know, it was supposed to be Dear Dorothy Dix type thing and Will was supposed to be Dorothy Dix replying to the student's letter, and the student was saying that she was very upset because all the other kids were allowed to wear jeans to school and she had to wear a school uniform, and Will's reply to this that, you know, their parents probably can't afford a school uniform and you should really feel sorry for them.

INT: (*laughs*)

DR DOUGLAS: And I said, 'But Will, most kids don't like wearing a school...' He just had no idea.

Dr Douglas feels it is difficult to assess how well the children are progressing from the feedback given by the distance education teachers. In the following transcript she discusses how she makes judgements about William's progress and gives him explicit knowledge about how to be successful at school. It is interesting to note how Dr Douglas attempts to shape William's learning practices in readiness for the competition of high school. William had just applied for a scholarship to attend Scotch College but she felt the lack of competition and speed in the distance education setting had probably disadvantaged him. Nevertheless, her successful school experiences allowed her to initiate William into the hidden curriculum of effective school practices by explaining how, if time runs short, random selection of multiple choice questions can be useful:

DR DOUGLAS: Well I think they deliberately don't rate them compared to other students.

INT: Right

DR DOUGLAS: And I so I wouldn't know whether they were praising all the students as much as they were praising Will or whether he is better.

INT: Right.

DR DOUGLAS: Or just the same or what, you know.

INT: You seem to have a pretty good idea of how he's going but say you hadn't had the same sort of education as you've had, would you find it difficult to know how well they were going, do you think?

DR DOUGLAS: Well I think with Grade 7 that's not so difficult. You know because you can see that he's able to do the work. The thing that I find difficult is the speed. You know because he can take all day if he wants, and sometimes he does take all day,...

INT: Oh right.

DR DOUGLAS: ...then you know, if he's in a class room he'll only get a quarter of the work and look to be a quarter as smart as the other kids who are able to do it quicker because there's no, you know. If he really has to he can do it but that was the thing that got him in the exam, the scholarship was that he didn't complete the paper.

INT: Right.

DR DOUGLAS: And I told him the trick of just filling in the multiple choice squares at the end but he forgot. When he heard the ten minutes was, ten minutes to go, he panicked because he realised he was only half way through and tried to do the last few questions quickly instead of just randomly filling the squares.

INT: So do you set him time limits when he's working?

DR DOUGLAS: It's not possible for him to keep them.

INT: Right.

DR DOUGLAS: You know, he just does it at his own pace. Some days, the maths only is an hour and other days it's obviously not an hour because he'll take an hour to cut the shapes out, you know, so and it's not only that easy to set time limits on him.

Although William told me on a number of occasions about his lack of speed in completing his work, he explained his views about his own progress as follows:

WILLIAM: First thing I look for stickers in my notes. I look for stickers first...

INT:	Why do you look for them?
WILLIAM:	Because I am a big sticker collector. I'm going to be really (inaudible) stickers.
INT:	So do you take the stickers off the things?
WILLIAM:	Yeah, I take them off the work.
INT:	What are the stickers for?
WILLIAM:	Doing good work. And then I look at the spelling errors and see if I find, what mistakes I've done and what sort of, what they told me about, see if made any mistakes (inaudible).
INT:	Do you read the comments?
WILLIAM:	Yes, I (inaudible) and I read them.
INT:	So which do you do first?
WILLIAM:	Mostly I get the stickers, then I read the teacher's letter and then I look at all my work that he sent back.
INT:	So, how, when you're...
WILLIAM:	Then I put my stickers in my little suitcase. Haha.

He told me that he reviewed his work before sending it off to his teacher by checking to see "if it's perfect". When I questioned him further about the criteria he used to check his work he said, "The correctness of it all, if it's right or wrong, and quality and the quantity of the work, and the quickness I've done the work". William has already constructed learning as a process of "getting things right".

Relationships

Despite the high expectations Dr Douglas has of William, they have a companionable and equitable relationship. In some ways they behave more like siblings than mother and son, with conversations moving from friendly banter to genuine exchanges of information. William is tolerant of Dr Douglas's requirements for precision and respects her knowledge and experience, although he is not past questioning it at times. The following transcript shows William challenging his mother's knowledge. In this exchange Dr Douglas attempts to dissuade him from his view that book knowledge is always correct:

WILLIAM:	Mm. Okay. 'What should you do to assist someone who has got a cut on their finger?' Wash the cut and apply medication.
DR DOUGLAS:	Antiseptic. Anti septic.
WILLIAM:	Oh wait, it says here 'Wash wound and apply dressing'.
DR DOUGLAS:	Antiseptic. Still think you have to put antiseptic on it.

WILLIAM:	Well the book...
DR DOUGLAS:	Yeah I know, the book's not always right.
INT:	(*laughs*) Ask your Mum, she's a doctor.
WILLIAM:	But the book knows.
DR DOUGLAS:	No it doesn't know.
WILLIAM:	Books know everything.
DR DOUGLAS:	No, it doesn't know.
INT:	Not always. You can only get a certain amount of information.
WILLIAM:	Thought people write down everything in books.
DR DOUGLAS:	Wrote.
WILLIAM:	Wrote.
DR DOUGLAS:	Yeah but that would be if you read every book.
WILLIAM:	Yeah but the book knows.
DR DOUGLAS:	But I've got a medical degree ten years ago as a doctor, so I reckon that probably I might know a bit better than a high school book.

In another interaction, you can see Dr Douglas take on her role of informant while enjoying some playful banter with William. In the following transcript Dr Douglas links her medical knowledge to the outcomes of alcoholism, while also explaining how Australian men attain their peculiar shape. Notice how William was corrected when he put forward the slightly incorrect proposition, "they drink too much oestrogen from beer". Dr Douglas often asserts a pedagogic position as she converses with her children and always takes care to clarify any inaccuracies in William's propositional knowledge:

WILLIAM:	Oestrogen. Only women have oestrogen.
DR DOUGLAS:	No, women are not the only people to have oestrogen.
WILLIAM:	Where I don't have any.
DR DOUGLAS:	(inaudible)
WILLIAM:	But I don't have big boobs (*laughs*).
DR DOUGLAS:	But if you were an alcoholic.. .
WILLIAM:	And I don't have a podgy tummy or a big bum either.
DR DOUGLAS:	...(inaudible) you would get (inaudible).
WILLIAM:	Yeah, they're big muscly guys.
DR DOUGLAS:	No, you've seen fat guys.
WILLIAM:	Yeah and they drink too much oestrogen from beer.
DR DOUGLAS:	No, no they don't drink the oestrogen in beer.
WILLIAM:	Where?

DR DOUGLAS: They drink too much alcohol and their liver gets sick and they can't (inaudible/overspeaking)...

WILLIAM: Oh.

DR DOUGLAS: ...(inaudible).

INT: So let that be warning to you. (*laughs*)

WILLIAM: I don't even like the taste of beer.

DR DOUGLAS: ....Beer turns blokes into girls.

WILLIAM: Oh well that's sexist, Mum. That's criticising yourself.

English

William readily set to work on his English for the morning. He opened his text book and quickly skimmed through the instructions looking for the task that he was required to do. He was asked to read through a play which provided different points of view given by adults and children about the preservation of trees. Then he needed to complete the following activity:

> Under the headings SAVE THE TREE and CHOP DOWN THE TREE, list their reasons. Add some of your own if you wish.

He quickly wrote:

> SAVE THE TREE
>
> the children have played in the tree for along time. The children's parents pay rates. The tree doesn't do any harm.
>
> CHOP DOWN THE TREE
>
> It costs of money to pune the trees. It costs a lot of money to water the trees.

When he had completed the previous task, he briefly referred back to the text to find out what to do next. However in his haste to complete the next activity as quickly as possible he failed to read the instructions accurately. For the next task, he was asked to write brief notes about the rescue of an endangered plant, animal, region or building and then write a summary paragraph of how the rescue took place. He misinterpreted the task and instead wrote a summary of the play which provided the background for the previous task he had just finished. He wrote:

> One day some workmen came to chop down a old tree. The children playing in the tree protest. The workmen leave and return with a policeman who tells them to come down. The adults leave and return with a fire engine and a ladder. Then the children wobble the ladder. Then the policeman tries to climb the ladder

and the children wobble the ladder harder. The adults leave and return with the Mayor who cancels the tree cuttings project.

When William was asked about his writing practices he explained about the importance of spelling, which appears to be a major concern of his, as well as the need to have good ideas. In the following transcript, notice how William is able to identify the importance of providing essential information, the use of appropriate language as well as the use of effective spelling and punctuation:

WILLIAM: Um, you have to know how to write, for one. You have to know how to write letters and spelling really. Have to know how, you have to be interested in what you're writing otherwise what you're writing, you'll find it really boring and go outside and do something else, really bored with it.

INT: Right. And how would you make sure you're a good writer?

WILLIAM: You practice. Practice a lot. Pick up tips from other people that know how to write better.

INT: If I gave you a, oh sorry go on.

WILLIAM: Had to have a good imagination if you're writing stories that are...

INT: Say I gave you a piece of someone's, another child's writing to read and asked you to tell me how good a writer, you think that they are, what would sort of things would you use to judge it by?

WILLIAM: Spelling an, see if there's any spelling errors. I'd see if the story has, if they haven't copied the story from some other book, (inaudible) poor imagination. I'd look to see if they'd missed out any punctuation, if they'd left out a whole part of the story and just dropped that bit and then gone onto the next part of the story that's more interesting. See if there's a big gap in the story. I'd see if it was fiction or non-fiction to find out if they liked fictional things or non-fictional things. I'd find out what subject they're writing about, so I know what they're interested in. If the story is really exciting and interesting, if it's like a mystery sort of and want to find out who's the culprit.

William has a good metacognitive understanding of how to produce effective writing. Unfortunately, his concern to get the job done as quickly as possible, sometimes over-rides his inherent understanding of the task. William is often trying to get ahead of the schedule so that he can have some days off when

someone goes into town. This concern often mitigates against his capacity to complete his work thoroughly. On a number of occasions, William told me how he was loath to let on if he did not understand something properly, in case his mother made him do it again. He also explained how he keeps quiet if he finds the work easy for fear of being given more work to do, "I tend to keep quiet so I don't have to do any more". This attitude is evident in the following discussion:

INT:	Now what are you going to do now that you've done your draft? What are you going to do ...?
WILLIAM:	Now I'm going to check them, spelling and the mistakes, so (inaudible) the book.
INT:	When you're writing a summary like that what sorts of things do you think about when you're writing it?
WILLIAM:	I don't really think about anything. I just think about getting it done and (inaudible).
INT:	How do you know if it's going to be a good summary?
WILLIAM:	I just look at the story and find the best thing most similar (inaudible).
INT:	Does it tell you in the book how to write a summary?
WILLIAM:	No, it just tells me how to write a draft though.
INT:	So how did you learn how to write a summary in the first place?
WILLIAM:	I learned how to write a summary when I was in Grade 5, (inaudible) learned how to write a summary and made a (inaudible).

Just "getting things done" drives much of William's school practices.

Maths

William is very confident about maths. He claims, "I can do large sums in my head, that's pretty easy, sums no problem". He also finds "brain busters no problem. I'll work them out". He proceeds with his maths quite happily, rarely asking his mother for assistance and entertaining himself with his imaginary monologues. However, the maths text book asks the home tutor to play maths games with the students and to ask the student to explain some of the maths concepts. William waited until Dr Douglas had a few moments free from working with Mia and then asked his mother to play the game with him. The purpose of the game was to provide practice at estimation. The players needed to choose two numbers which when multiplied together would give a product under 500. The person who made scores closest to 500 would gain the highest marks. The first person to score 25 marks won the game. At first William did not fully understand the task, so Dr Douglas modelled how she was doing the estimation:

DR DOUGLAS: Right, now watch what I do with the 20, because 2 times 2 is 4. 20 times 20 is 400, so I only need to be a little bit over 20 to get 401 don't I? So you can do the trick with the 20's or the 30's.

WILLIAM: Mm.

DR DOUGLAS: We're going to run out of the 5 points in a minute.

WILLIAM: 31, 31 and mm, 40, mm, 30 (inaudible) 31 times 14, mm, bingo. There Mum, there.

DR DOUGLAS: Watch which numbers I choose.

William was still unable to match the skill of Dr Douglas and began to get frustrated, because he likes to win these sort of games. So Dr Douglas explained how to round the numbers up or down in order to do the estimation quickly:

DR DOUGLAS: Will the idea's to round them up, so you go 40 times 20, 3 2's are 6 would get you to 600. Now it's got to be slightly less than 600, so this is probably going to be too much isn't it?

WILLIAM: Yes.

DR DOUGLAS: So you round them up and just multiply them quickly. You don't multiply the 7's and things out.

WILLIAM: Oh.

DR DOUGLAS: That's the idea of this game, so you can do it quickly. You should really do it with a time clock on it.

William then explained his geometry to his mother as requested in the text. He discussed his understanding of the way a straight line is the same as 180 degrees. In the following excerpt notice how Dr Douglas checked carefully to make sure he was clear about the concept and then extended William's knowledge by summarising the meaning in her own words:

DR DOUGLAS: Now the angle's a straight line. And what is it. What is 180 degrees? What else is it?

WILLIAM: It's a half.

DR DOUGLAS: It's a half of ...?

WILLIAM: An angle, of a whole.

DR DOUGLAS: Of a ...?

WILLIAM: A circle.

DR DOUGLAS: Circle. That's right. It's a half of a circle. It's a straight line that you draw through the circle.

WILLIAM: It's the diameter.

DR DOUGLAS: The bottom of the protractor, isn't it?

WILLIAM: Yeah. Right. Whatever.

DR DOUGLAS: So if you draw a straight line with a ruler and measure it with a protractor, you'll get 180 degrees. So have you finished your maths for today?

In the above extract Dr Douglas reinforced pedagogic knowledge as well as the importance of getting things right and being precise.

Health

William pressed on with his health activities despite finding them boring and, at times, difficult to understand. He was asked to provide first aid treatment for situations which were illustrated by diagrams. He found the diagrams ambiguous and was forced to use a strategy of elimination to work out the answers. When he asked for my assistance, I had to admit to the same confusion. Nevertheless, he continued with the task in an effort to "get it done". As he worked through the exercise he complained a couple of times about the lack of space provide for the answers:

> Says you need to clear the, clear the airway with your fingers and give them mouth to mouth resuscitation to help airways become clear again. I wish they'd give me more room to write in. They give you one line to write in and sometimes you have to use three lines.

William's sense of humour or imagination appears to sustain him whenever he is confronted with tasks which are dull or boring. The following extract shows how William entertained himself whenever he found activities tedious:

> Oh, what to do in this case. Action. What happened to him. Show the person putting a band aid on them for. They don't do a very good, they don't draw very good, scrappy pictures, put all these little pimples on their faces instead of freckles. I'm going to draw freckles. He's so polite. Okay, 'Use the textbook on (inaudible) for treatment. Stop any bleeding.' That'll do. Stop any bleeding. I might join the police force for a while.

Conclusion

William appears to have constructed an ambivalent set of learning practices. On one hand he is self-reliant and has the literacy skills to work from the text without help. He believes that books "are always right". He also wants to "get things right" and to acquire the classical knowledge his mother has. He has been strongly constructed as a "good" student, so he is confident about his own capacity to do well. On the other hand he is strongly driven to "get the task done" with as little effort as possible and to conceal any lack of knowledge in case he is required to do more work. He seems to cope with

these ambiguities by turning school work into an entertainment practice through the use of imaginary dialogues which allow him "to get things done" while sometimes attending to the precision required of him by his mother. While Dr Douglas doesn't play a major role in helping William with his school work, she does have the capacity to check the accuracy of his propositional knowledge and to challenge him to think beyond the set materials.

CHAPTER 16
CASE STUDY 10: SHAUN JACOBS
CASE STUDY 11: GREG JACOBS

Helen House

Kiara Station is in a pastoral region situated some hundreds of kilometres north of Perth 400 metres off one of the sealed main roads to the north of the state. The Jacobs family has resided on this property for two generations. Prior to taking up this property, the family had another station in the district. The main homestead on the property is rambling, weathered and, in part, under reconstruction. Sheds and yards surround the homestead with an abundance of machinery and animal pens. Goats, pigs and horses reside in these homestead pens. There is a second house, a transportable home, about 100 metres from the homestead. The activities on this station include some new initiatives to make the property more versatile and financially viable. The Jacobs are developing a successful horticultural business, they have a licence to kill kangaroos and a licence "to pull sandalwood". The homestead area reflects the variety of activities that are taking place on this station.

Mr and Mrs and Jacobs have four children. Harriet (Year 11) is at boarding school in Perth. Greg is in Year 8 and Shaun is in Year 6. Both boys are working with distance education. Greg and Shaun have also been on school of the air for part of their primary school education. Madeleine, the youngest, has just started pre-primary with the Distance Education Centre. The children enjoy their station life of motor bikes, horses, roo shooting, gymkhanas, grandparents and picnics in the bush.

Mr Jacobs worked on distance education as a primary student and then continued to Year 12 at boarding school. He did one year of a science degree at university and then decided that it was "not for him" and returned to the station. He has very positive memories of his primary education by correspondence. He tutored Shaun and Greg in Mathematics during 1993, until his work commitments became too demanding. Mrs Jacobs had been tutoring the boys in their other subjects. At the beginning of 1994, a home tutor was employed as the new station initiatives made too many demands on Mrs Jacobs time.

Kirsty has been the home tutor for Shaun and Greg since the beginning of 1994. Kirsty is a secondary mathematics teacher and is enjoying the change from the traditional teaching role. In 1993 she was the "govo" on a station in South Australia. She plans to teach at Kiara until the end of the third term and then return to her home in Victoria to take up a teaching position in outdoor education. Kirsty enjoys the station life. She is also able to leave the station most weekends to socialise in the nearby town and at the coast.

Up until last year, Mr Jacobs' parents lived on the station and commuted the one hundred kilometres, each day, to the business they had bought in a nearby town. Shaun and Greg travelled with their grandparents, to the school in town for about ten months. This journey was very tiring for the boys and their grandparents. During 1993, the grandparents decided to move into the local town and commute to the station on weekends. This move has worked well and they thoroughly enjoy retaining the link with the station life and their grandchildren. Mrs Jacobs describes her husband's parents "as real grandparents who enjoy doing things with their grandchildren"

Shaun's and Greg's classroom is a transportable building, purchased from a mining company and is located 10 metres from the back door of the homestead. This building has two rooms. The larger room is the school room and the smaller room is Kirsty's bedroom. In the classroom the boys each have a desk. Greg's desk is located by the door and Shaun has his desk and computer on the opposite wall. The room is divided on one side by a ceiling to floor bookcase. Behind the bookcase is a bean bag and sheepskins where the boys often read and cuddle the dogs. At the end of the room there are benches on two sides with ample natural light. This area is suitable for doing science experiments and art work. The walls and ceiling of the schoolroom have language charts, maps, art work and merit certificates displayed. The boys are dressed in the functional station garb of jeans, jumpers and jackets. The boys and the home tutor wear elastic sided boots.

The schoolroom is well organised and functional yet relaxed enough to allow the dogs to visit and interact with the boys from time to time. There are ten dogs on this station and most will visit at some time during the school day. Mr Jacobs made the point that "all the dogs were totally useless as far as station work goes". It is obvious that Shaun, Greg and Kirsty view the dogs as an important part of the classroom environment. Shaun and Greg work approximately four to four and a half hours each day on their school work. Kirsty indicated that the boys would sometimes work longer depending on the lessons and how well they were working. Both Kirsty and Mrs Jacobs emphasised the importance of organisation and routine in the classroom. It is very important to keep to the time table and "not get behind".

The school day timetable is as follows:
8.00 AM to 10.00 AM Classroom
10.00 AM to 10.30 AM Smoko
10.30 AM to Midday Classroom.
Midday to 1.00 PM Lunch with the family in the homestead.
1.00 PM to 2.30 PM Classroom.

Aspirations For Their Children

Mr Jacobs indicates the children "may end up on the land". Therefore, he said "it is important they go away to school and see different situations". He emphasises the need for the children do some trade training if they do decide to return to the station. Education is valued and he wants the children to aim

for the highest education level possible. A TAFE or university course would be encouraged if it were appropriate for any member of the family. Mr Jacobs suggests that isolated families should be assisted more with the education of their children. Boarding school presented difficulties, both financial and emotional, for members of the family. Mrs Jacobs is more specific about the aspirations and prospects for the children:

> Greg will be on the land. Harriet just loves the land but she wants to do something else too. She just wants to do nursing or bio-chemistry, something like that. Shaun is a social little fella, I do not think he will end up on a station. He is just social and you just do not have that on a station, what he wants to do. He likes to do things all the time and he likes to have people around him. Whereas Greg just goes off and he's a different child. He can do things on his own and he prefers to be on his own half the time. Madeleine I don't know. She does love the station life she is a real tomboy. Harriet would very much like to come home and do year 12 on distance education she likes the school but hates the boarding. She knows that is the best place to be but she just likes being with the family all the time.

Contact with the School

Mrs Jacobs talked about her experiences prior to Kirsty's arrival. If the children were having problems the teachers wanted to explain the lessons to the students and they were encouraged to ring up, not the parents. "That is the system", she said. "If it is a bit above the boys then they will want to speak to the home tutor".:

> I had a fair bit of contact with the school when I was teaching the boys. Yeah, with lots of things and a lot of time if I did not understand something I'd send the boys to phone up their teacher. I was pretty well on the ball when it came to that side of it because I liked to be one step ahead with the lessons and have everything here ready and everything organised because if not, I just get in a total mess. I speak, not this year but other years I have spoken a heck of a lot for advice and stuff like that. Sometimes I don't know how to put over something that is quite easy for a teacher to put over and I think "Now how the hell am I supposed to teach this concept and I do not even know it"?

Mrs Jacobs found that other contacts with the school were not appropriate:

> I do not go to any of the school stuff mainly because I find I get too far behind and when I had three children in the classroom it was a bit of a joke because you'd have higher school, you'd have junior camp and the bigger kids camp and it just never worked out. I could never go away with all of them and sometimes it just wasn't the right time to leave them all home. It just never worked out and I found that I just couldn't catch up. As much as the kids would have loved them but it was a week out of your term and the sets do

> not allow for children to have weeks off and they do not allow kids to have long weekends. You've still got to catch up those days up and if your child is a little bit, or not a fast worker, you may as well forget it.

Kirsty mainly has contact with the school by phone. However, she can make comments on Shaun's work via the computer and she writes comments on both boys' sets:

> On the computer with Shaun I write a little comment after each day's English and there's also another comment after each day's maths to fill in as well and also at the end of a two week period, this is Shaun's work anyway, there is a report that I fill in if anything comes up, then I write about it. With Greg I sometimes write a few notes to his teachers. Usually by the end of the term or the end of the unit giving my views on his attitude which is something that they can't pick up on.

Kirsty indicates that she has got to know the teachers reasonably well. Shaun has Charles as his teacher and he has visited the station. Of Greg's teachers, Kirsty has had most contact with the English teacher. She has also spoken with Max, the co-ordinator for the region, from time to time. Greg and Shaun have camps later in the year. Shaun is definitely going to his camp but there has not yet been a decision about Greg's camp.

Time Spent Together

Mr Jacobs takes the family to the outdoor pictures in town once a month. On the weekends they will often head out into the bush for a picnic or a barbecue. If possible, once a year, the family would make a trip to Geraldton or Perth. In the section of transcript below, Mrs Jacobs talks about the family activities:

MRS JACOBS:	Well I, just lately I've been spending a bit but then [Mr Jacobs] has taken them shooting a few nights, you know, during the years.
INT:	Yes so that's a great time for them.
MRS JACOBS:	And we go to gymkhanas together. We go and camp at gymkhanas together.
INT:	And you all ride?
MRS JACOBS:	No. Four of the, ah Fred, Harriet and I don't ride but Fred and the boys and Madeleine ride. Four of them ride so, but that's something we've been starting to do together because I said to Fred we don't do anything together anymore so why don't we try it and we really like it and we quite often go to the race meetings together. What else is on together? Um. Not a heck of a lot of things actually. Ah, let's think. Mm.

INT: Right, ah, what about any, are you able to participate in much of the community stuff around there, or I presume that's a bit limiting?

MRS JACOBS: It's a little bit hard because if it's something that's on every week you've got to travel to town and sometimes you just don't go because it's too far to go in and out at night and back again because it's a good hour in and out plus an hour back so ...

INT: Well I was thinking that when Kirsty said she went in to play indoor cricket?

MRS JACOBS: Yes, she does, indoor cricket. Yeah it is and of course most of the things are on at night time and um but I'm thinking that perhaps next year if I've got them all here we'll get them all joined into something because I have to make the effort so they do some socialising and (inaudible) to be competitive.

Spending time together is something that Mrs Jacobs is concerned about. "Life on the station is too busy and there is no time to just be with the kids," she said. The boys like to "dink" their mother on the motor bike, checking the mills, as this gives them the opportunity to talk about problems or "anything".

Mrs Jacobs also talks about getting time by "yourself". Although the family is close, it is important to have some "time to yourself", she said:

> You don't have a lot of time to yourself really. If you want it you can have it. You can just go away and spend time on your own but really you only see each other, you see each other all day every day unless you go out and do a job and come back but you're either with one of us. You're not just on your own so it's something you either have to grow into or be able to um, I don't know, sometimes it's hard for the governesses to come into our, into the family because they get sick of seeing the same people all the time whereas, well I can understand that. Whereas, we learn to cope with that and you've got to be really considerate of other people's feelings. You can't, not so much me, but each other. I don't walk around raving all the time but um and they're used to me but I do have to watch where I step sometimes.

Family Literacy Practices

TV and Computers

The main viewing time for the family is in the evenings and for special sporting events on the weekends. Mr Jacobs enjoys watching the news, weather and current affairs programs. He will also watch sport on the weekend if he is not busy. Mrs Jacobs enjoys nature films, documentaries and light entertainment. She is not fond of programs that are "too action packed".

Both Mr and Mrs Jacobs indicate the family have no particular family favourites on TV. Kirsty mainly watches the television on Friday and Saturday night and it will usually be a movie. Mrs Jacobs points out how busy they are on the station and there is not time to sit down and watch television with the kids. Mr Jacobs indicated listening to the radio or a CD fitted in much better with the power schedule than watching television.

Greg says he watches television "every night and every afternoon when the motor is on". When asked what he liked to watch he said "I just watch whatever is on if its good". He describes "a television series that you watch all the time as good". *Beverley Hills 90210* is one series that Greg enjoys. Greg sometimes discusses the television series with other members of the family but was not sure how much influence the programs had on other people as, he said "I do not watch television with other people".

Shaun talked about the movie *A Town Like Alice* and he indicated the family watched the movie often. When asked if he discussed the television with the family, Shaun said "Like if there is a word we don't know I will ask Dad". Shaun said that he watched movies and sometimes watched horror movies. He watched *Razorback* for his birthday but in the middle of the movie he went to read a book. Shaun would much rather watch comedies and this seems more in keeping with his bubbly personality

Shaun uses the computer for his school work. Greg was sent a computer when he was doing business studies with the school. Mrs Jacobs says the family occasionally plays games on the computer. Mrs Jacobs was surprised that more of the boy's school work was not done on the computer. As she explained:

> I did ask Kirsty to enquire about the computer, could Greg still send work, apart from his business studies, down to distance education? He was doing some of his essays on there and they were sending them down to Perth on the disc and printing them in Perth. That stopped after second term and I was quite surprised really.

The boys have music on when they go to sleep. In the daytime they do not listen to the radio very much "once they are out of that school room they are gone", explained Mrs Jacobs.

Reading and Writing

Mr Jacobs reads rural publications and information from the agriculture department on horticulture. He does not have the time to read novels. Mrs Jacobs, when asked about reading said "What things do I like to read? I don't get to read". Mrs Jacobs enjoys *The Countryman* and *Elders Weekly* as they write about issues "that concern us". The family enjoy borrowing books from the local public library. Greg and Shaun use this library and they also borrow books from the local primary school, mainly for school projects, rather than for leisure.

INT: So you and the boys would tend not to perhaps borrow actual library books for reading, just straight reading, not leisure?

MRS JACOBS: No, no. No I think the boys, a lot of books they get from school. I notice they read a little bit of you know whatever attracts them, they read them. Shaun quite often, he probably reads more than Greg. But they don't just sit down and read a book. I mean life's too busy to read a book. They, especially, when they go to bed at night, you know when they go at eight o'clock I know Bruce gets out their *Living Australia*. Do you know that series?

INT: Yes.

MRS JACOBS: He reads that quite a bit and I notice other books and bits a pieces. A lot of Madeleine's books he's into. He just reads them, just light reading, he just, any books, because a lot of them are (inaudible) books when they were younger and I think quite often I'm picking up books from near his bed. Yeah, he's quite, but sometimes Greg reads but not half as much as Shaun. If it interests him, like cars or horses, the subjects that interest him, motorbikes, anything to do, he'll read it but when it's just reading for enjoyment I don't, he's just not into it.

Shaun indicated he read when he went to bed, in the car or when he was bored. He enjoyed reading the Post, comics and letters. He gets most of his books from distance education and recently he had been sent *Indiana Jones*, which he enjoyed. Greg tends to keep his reading to a minimum.

INT: Do you read much in your leisure time?

GREG: No.

INT: But if you do read, how often would you read, like say the *Elders Weekly* do you read that?

GREG: Oh, 5 seconds.

Greg prefers to look at gun books, motor bike books and the *TV Week*. Like Shaun, he gets most of his books from distance education. He would not borrow a book from the library "just for fun". Greg and Shaun study the classified advertisements in *Elders Weekly* for motor bikes, guns and horse floats. Kirsty enjoys reading a wide range of books. "A bit of fantasy, a bit of science fiction," she said. "Anything that grabs my attention, I like nice chunky books". Kirsty does not use the library. She tends to have her own supply and she has joined a book club. Kirsty does talk to the boys about what they have been reading in school. Kirsty and Shaun have been discussing the

instructions from a book on tanning goat skins. They work on the skins after school and they want to sell them in the local craft shop.

Mr Jacobs keeps records of the station activities. He keeps a detailed diary of the progress that he has made in the horticultural project. Mrs Jacobs used to write lots of letters but she does not get the time any more:

> I used to write. When the kids were little I used to make time to write to my nans and everybody. Not now. No. So writing, as far as, I just write my lists and do my bits and pieces of mail but that's hardly anything.

She suggests that the telephone is now "too handy" and that is why she does not write letters. Greg could not think of any time that he had written a letter, other than for school. Shaun writes letters to his old school friends in town. He does not write them regularly and sometimes he "gets so busy he forgets to send them". Kirsty writes "lots and lots of letters". She occasionally writes letters to the children's teachers. She always writes comments at the end of each day, on the computer, and a report every two weeks. She writes notes about Greg's progress at the end of the term or at the end of a unit.

What is Distance Education like for the family?

Educating students on distance education can be a demanding commitment, especially when there are diverse activities requiring constant attention. This puts extra pressure on different aspects of family life. Mr Jacobs indicated that it was hard to balance his role on the station between parenting, supervising and his actual occupation. "Time and relationships can be difficult," he said. Mrs Jacobs confirmed that workload was a problem as well as maintaining a harmonious relationship within the family.

Mr Jacobs thought that school work had changed since he was at school. "The emphasis is not on reading, spelling and writing" he said. In mathematics he felt quite comfortable with the material and the jargon was not a problem. When Mrs Jacobs was tutoring, she found the maths difficult and was quite relieved that Mr Jacobs could assist:

> Well the worst one for me to teach was maths and my husband helped me out with that about the last year or so when we were teaching, for the two years and he would do the maths and I could cope with the rest. But the maths, because sometimes you can't be two people and if you're both doing maths at the same time it was unbearable. It was just hopeless. That especially, in the lower grades. It was just hopeless because you just can't be, one-to-one you're fine but from one-to-two it was hopeless because they need you right there with them, and I'm not a maths person.

She emphasised that it is hard being a home tutor, coping with the jargon by yourself, especially in the beginning. "You make a lot of mistakes too and you think, oh heck, how does that affect your child?" She is very conscious of the

responsibility of educating the children at home. "You're responsible really and if it does not work out well you're to blame aren't you?" As she explained:

> When I first started it was a big problem because when you have had nothing to do with school or anything like that. I really feel they should give you a little insight on some of these things because I was just, well, an ordinary mother that knew 'bugger-all' about it. Well I didn't know. Well, I'd left school a fair while ago and it all changed so much that it was just, and some of the um, I learned over the years though. Well you do, but someone said to me after a couple of years you'll be right and it's true, too.

Mrs Jacobs stressed the importance of knowing the material and being confident when presenting the material. "When you are not confident and you can't get it over really well to a child, they just think it is a joke and do not comprehend it very well either," she said. She felt concerned because some subjects "were just left out as they were too difficult to organise. We never did a great deal of art, yet that was probably the most fun, but it was just something you could leave". She also indicated it was difficult to give each child the same amount of attention with their lessons. Mrs Jacobs speculates that the youngest child tends to get the most attention in the classroom. Mrs Jacobs said when she was teaching Harriet, Greg and Shaun, "someone was always yelling out because someone else wasn't getting enough attention, because of the one-to-one I suppose".

She felt that distance education was advantageous as it meant the children did not have to go away to boarding school. They could continue their education at home depending on the family's situation. The Jacobs would like the children to have the opportunity to go to boarding school. However, if finances became difficult they would always have the option of distance education. For instance, if there were not enough funds for Greg to continue his education at boarding school he would stay as he is. Harriet is also putting some pressure on her parents to leave boarding school and "do Year 12" with distance education.

Even though the boys have a home tutor, Mrs Jacobs feels that she should sit in on some of the lessons and monitor the boys' progress. Mrs Jacobs realises how difficult and important it is for the home tutor to maintain a good relationship with their students:

> It's very hard to come out of that school room and say, and turn off and be just mum because you just can't because if you're angry when you come out of that school room or annoyed it just stems on and you, it just continues on. You try not to but it's just 'Oh, how are you supposed to cut the line there?'

Kirsty handles the distance education material well but she can see that it may be difficult for parents. "I'm a maths teacher but some of the concepts they are teaching kids nowadays, some parents wouldn't even have come across so

that would be hard for them," she said. She feels her background as a teacher is significant.

Students and Supervision

Kirsty supervises and organises both the boys. The Co-ordinator from the school has sent Greg a subject timetable and he tries to follow that. "Greg decides if he will do a little or a lot," she said. He works with little supervision and Kirsty assists him with deadlines and if he does not understand something. Kirsty spends most of her time supervising Shaun, as he has to be kept on task. He maintains that he works on the computer without any assistance. The regular timetable, 8.00 AM to 2.00 PM is adhered to, and only changed if the boys are sick, Dad needs them or they are on a camp. Kirsty has found that, as the year goes on, Greg needs to spend more time on his units and he needs a full school day to finish his work. Kirsty says the assistance varies depending on the problem and situation:

> It varies depending on whether they've put in a bit of time before hand but usually I'll read the question and maybe even try to re-word the question so they may not understand how it was written but I'll re-word it and re-phrase it and then most of the times they will be able to work it out from there. Even if they haven't got it at the end then I might give them a few hints and if they still haven't got it well then I might start giving them the answers but I try to avoid just saying 'okay this is the answer' because then they haven't tried to do anything to get the answer. If I can get them to give me the answer then I think that's better.

Greg and Shaun do their school work in the purpose built classroom. Shaun uses a computer for his work and at the end of each week he sends it to the school over the phone line by modem. Greg used the computer in first term but it is not necessary for the units on which he is currently working. In the large bookcase in the classroom, there is a set of encyclopedias, a dictionary and reference books for the boys and the home tutor to use. The boys use the phone often to contact the school. There is a fax machine on the station but the boys rarely use it. There is a satellite dish for the television. Shaun indicates that he does most of his learning from the TV. However, Greg feels that he learns from TV and books.

SHAUN: YEAR 6

Shaun does not appear to be an independent or self motivated student. He relies on the home tutor, Kirsty, for organisation and inspiration in his school work. Kirsty directs his lessons each day and makes sure that he is progressing appropriately through the units. Shaun appears to be happy with this situation. Mrs Jacobs indicates from her observations that Shaun "just goes from day to day":

> I don't think he knows because I asked him a couple of things this morning and he says 'Oh I don't know, Oh I might finish that'. You know, he doesn't really, it doesn't worry him.

He asks lots of questions and tends to turn to Kirsty before reading his texts properly. Shaun is very easily distracted and will talk to the dogs or join in the conversation when Kirsty assists Greg with his work. He appears to finds it difficult to concentrate especially if he is asked to read text by himself in the classroom.

SHAUN:	Can't I just read the story. (*Shaun sings to the dog)*
SHAUN:	Shelley it is good when you go up to the bush, it is really neat. It is a neat tape recorder.
KIRSTY:	Have you read it?
SHAUN:	I have read some of it
KIRSTY:	Come on read some more, concentrate (*Shaun sighs*).

Shaun is a very sociable student and enjoys talking and discussing text with Kirsty, Greg, the dogs or who ever happens to be in the classroom. At times, especially when they are fighting, Kirsty needs to throw the dogs 'out' of the classroom because they are too much of a distraction.

Unfortunately, Shaun's talking is sometimes inappropriate in the classroom and it brings him into conflict with Kirsty. At times Shaun appears to contest Kirsty's control in the classroom and this makes tutoring difficult. Mrs Jacobs confirms that this is a problem in the classroom:

> Yes, he's got his mouth going half the time and the other day I was at the clothes line and I could hear him going on and on and on and I said 'What is going on here?' because I said 'This isn't supposed to happen in school' and I said 'I'll just have to see dad about this' and he shut up. He was pretty good to tell me that he hadn't had a row with Kirsty that day because I think he had, because I think they lock horns a little bit and he come out and he said 'Oh mum I was good today. I had no rows' and I said 'Was it nicer in the school room today?' and he said 'Yes it was,' and I said, 'Well do you have to be painful sometimes?' and it's just him.

When asked about the help he received form Kirsty, Shaun was positive. "If you can't work out a sum or something or if you don't know anything about it, Kirsty just comes over and gives you a real good hand," he said.

Shaun describes himself as "not so good" as a student:

INT:	Why do you think that?

SHAUN: Well, I don't think - like I don't really want to go away to school or go to college or something. Just stay here.

INT: You'd like to do your work on distance education?

SHAUN: Yeah.

INT: So you'd like to stay on the station?

SHAUN: Yeah.

Shaun indicates he knows how he is going with his lessons by the marks, comments and "stickers" he gets from school.

Learning Practices

English

Shaun is positive about the units he does for English and he indicates the topics are interesting and the assignments "pretty good". Kirsty feels that in some areas the material could be more stimulating:

> His English sets, they're not bad. Like, I like it how he has to read a story each day. I think that's excellent. The actual content of the things that he has to do though, I don't know. I'm not an English teacher so I'm sure they could be improved. There's some units there that are really boring. They have no interest to the kids whatsoever and they've got to do that for two weeks. Therefore, to get Shaun to actually do it can be quite difficult sometimes. Depending on the topic, especially if it's writing topics and they have to write specifically about something and Greg has no ideas then that becomes very hard. The topic he's doing at the moment is quite good. Lots of interesting stories and it isn't too bad.

Shaun enjoys using the computer for his English units and Kirsty indicates that his English work has improved markedly since he has been working on the computer. Shaun, too, thinks the computer has made a difference.

On the day I visited, Shaun was working on a comprehension unit called *The Sledge Race in Folk Tales and Fables (Year 6.)* He was asked to answer the following questions:

1. What do you think about Pele's attitude to losing? Have you ever known someone who was unable to accept the fact that he or she could not win all the time?
2. How do you feel when you lose? How do you feel when you win?
3. What do you think became of Vari?
4. What explanation can you give for the Hawaiian belief that Pele still hurls rocks and sends streams of molten lava over the beautiful islands that make up Hawaii.

Shaun appears to find this comprehension exercise quite enjoyable as he is legitimately able to discuss with Kirsty the issues and questions that arise from the exercise. At times he loses concentration and Kirsty needs to repeat questions to help to focus Shaun on the issues:

KIRSTY:	How do you feel when you lose? How do you feel when you win?
SHAUN:	Very happy
KIRSTY	What about when you lose?
SHAUN:	Very angry
KIRSTY:	What about when you lose something? Frustrated.
SHAUN:	Yes, frustrated.
KIRSTY:	What explanation can you give for the Hawaiian belief that Pele still hurls rocks and streams molten lava over the beautiful islands that make up Hawaii ?
SHAUN:	What was the question again?
KIRSTY:	What explanation can you give for the Hawaiian belief that Pele still hurls rocks and streams molten lava over the beautiful islands that make up Hawaii ?
SHAUN:	Volcanoes are still there?
KIRSTY:	Yes, so they believe what?
SHAUN:	She makes the volcanoes work.
KIRSTY:	Yes, right, they make the volcanoes work.

Shaun would like to get his work done as soon as possible. He finds it difficult to operate beyond a literal level. Kirsty needs to assist Shaun with his story writing by providing appropriate questioning, suggestions and encouragement. The following excerpt from his story writing lesson provides an example of this. Shaun is writing a story on the computer about hunting elephants.

KIRSTY:	Jot down a whole lot of ideas and words that are associated with hunting elephants. Read, look at the question first to see what you think about the situation. This will be a draft copy with your ideas about hunting elephants, anything that comes into your head at all. Then have a look at the question.
SHAUN:	I think you should not shoot them.
KIRSTY:	You think humans should kill animals to satisfy their own needs?
SHAUN:	Yes.

KIRSTY: Do you think there should be a limit to the number at any one time by any one person?

SHAUN: Yes.

KIRSTY: These sorts of things

SHAUN: One Yep.

KIRSTY: Got it.

SHAUN: Yep.

KIRSTY: Good.

SHAUN: Yep. Can I write I think people should not kill animals because of the extinction and that.

KIRSTY: Yes you can write that, yep.

Kirsty moves over to assist Greg and assumes that Shaun will begin the task. However, he waits until Kirsty has helped Greg and then he asks her to repeat the instructions. This time Kirsty reads them straight from the book which is exactly what she had told him in the first instance. Shaun takes the opportunity to do some more talking:

SHAUN: People should not shoot animals just for fun. Because at this mill one man went in and shot 30 goats and left them there.

KIRSTY: They do that with elephants sometimes. They usually shoot all the elephants take their tusks and leave them there to die.

SHAUN: I reckon you should shoot them.

KIRSTY: That might be an idea too. This is like a first draft.

SHAUN: (inaudible) writing. So just write that out there.

KIRSTY: Just do your first draft, you are still fiddling around with it, changing it and putting more ideas into it. I think you can probably write more than one little paragraph.

SHAUN: No.

KIRSTY: Come on. (*Shaun and Greg are talking to the dogs)*

KIRSTY: Come on guys, Shaun.

SHAUN: What else do I have to do about hunting animals? Is that okay? (*talking to the dog*)

KIRSTY: Oh yeah. (*Kirsty is getting annoyed with Shaun*)

SHAUN: Extinction, Kirst, do you know how to spell extinction? (*Kirsty spells extinction. Shaun tells Kirsty that he has seen a dog exactly the same as Shandy*)

SHAUN: (*looking at the dog*) Shandy sit down.

KIRSTY: Come on Shaun, keep going.

SHAUN': Right, I am going, double 'b' in rabbit. People should not kill animals just for fun but you can kill foxes and rabbits. Foxes and rabbits (inaudible) can be killed for fun because they will never run out.

KIRSTY: Not bad so far a few more paragraphs.

SHAUN: Just for fun full stop. Foxes and rabbits can be killed for fun just because they will never run out Good? (*Greg asks a question and Kirsty responds)*

SHAUN: People should not kill animals just for fun only for their own need.

KIRSTY: (Inaudible) and what about cows?

SHAUN: You should kill them because (inaudible)

KIRSTY: What about cattle and kangaroos?

SHAUN: Well if you don't have meat, the cats and dogs they will die as well.

KIRSTY: But you are saying now you should only kill one a month.

SHAUN: I was talking about an elephant there.

KIRSTY: Oh well you may need to modify it now that you are talking more generally.

Kirsty tries to get Shaun to focus his thoughts and work out what he wants to say.

SHAUN: Ex Extinct Ext (*Kirsty gives some assistance, inaudible*) people shouldn't kill animals.

KIRSTY: What about animals that are needed that we farm?

Finally, this discussion finishes because it is morning tea time.

Maths

Shaun approaches his mathematics in a similar manner to English. He does not appear to comprehend the overall nature of the maths tasks. He relies on Kirsty to take him through each step of a graphing exercise even though she encourages him to do it himself. She appears to think she has started him off and then starts to move away, only to have Shaun continue his questioning. Throughout the forty minute lesson he loses concentration and talks to the dogs and watches Greg do his science.

KIRSTY: Just keep following it down, step by step.

SHAUN: And then it goes in, half the block, so it would be just going in that one. That block, that half.

KIRSTY: Okay then - two is green so your number is one.

SHAUN: One. And then you go into another one. Then back into another one ... (inaudible) ... three, four - we go down here and up to there. There, done. That's a Christmas tree.

KIRSTY: Was it hard to find? How many branches have you got on yours?

SHAUN: Four.

KIRSTY: You got four on that one?

SHAUN: Yeah.

KIRSTY: Right, when you enlarge the ... (inaudible) to three times the size - triple life dimensions, so if you've got a square of one by one then you count three by three. You times it by three.

SHAUN: Yeah.

KIRSTY: Okay, so you'll do the same thing. You make your drawing larger, whose dimensions are three times the dimensions of the given ... (inaudible). Write the enlargement in the bottom left hand corner.

SHAUN: (inaudible) add three, three up so it will be six up.

KIRSTY: Careful.

SHAUN: There - look. Oh are we going up?

KIRSTY: Yeah, we do it the same way.

SHAUN Six ... (inaudible) ... six, because one, two three.

KIRSTY: Oh, you're going across ... (inaudible) ... oh yes. No. Not six.

SHAUN: What. We got three.

Kirsty uses quite complex language in the maths lesson and this highlights her secondary training. Part of the problem may be that Kirsty does not have the specific teaching skills to be able to show Shaun how to do things in a practical way.

Shaun find this task complex and he adopts his usual distracting behaviour. Kirsty appears to get impatient and her facial expressions indicate that she would like Shaun to concentrate. He takes no notice of these cues and continues with his questioning and unrelated comments.

SHAUN: The second area is eight times bigger than the first area.

KIRSTY: (Inaudible)

SHAUN: Eight times bigger. Do you know why he's got a blood nose?

KIRSTY: Why?

SHAUN: Greg's ... real fast. Slam ... in the head. We were fooling around in dad's room on the bed. Yeah,

he grabbed me like that. I had my head there and he jumped over me ... my head into the bed (*laughs, lots of activity with the dog but inaudible*)

SHAUN: Where did I put that picture of the boat show? (*Whistling*)

Kirsty likes Shaun's maths sets. "They are good and cover quite a large variety of topics," she said. Kirsty prepares written comments at the end of each day's maths and writes a detailed report at the end of every two week period.

Conclusion

Shaun is a confident, likeable, bubbly, gregarious and friendly child. He enjoys his life on the station and has many interests. Shaun appears to find school tedious and inconsequential to his life. Therefore, he adopts a range of distracting behaviours, that include the dogs or stories of funny incidents on the station, to get through each school day. Shaun is fortunate to have supportive parents and a patient home tutor who is prepared to work closely with him and encourage his efforts at every stage. He is a dependant learner and relies on the home tutor for organisation and motivation in the classroom.

GREG: YEAR 8

Learning Practices

Greg would much rather be out on the station riding his motorbike or horse, than in the classroom doing lessons. Therefore, he has adopted an instrumental view of learning and takes a pragmatic approach to the lessons. The work has to be done and the sooner he gets the work done the sooner he is able to leave the classroom. He is a capable independent worker and appears reluctant to ask for Kirsty's assistance, particularly in English and social studies. Greg's teacher has given him a timetable to follow so that he does approximately 45 minutes per day on each subject:

KIRSTY: Usually they need a bit of help and pushing along. Greg has got quite specific deadlines with his work and did you see his little timetable up on the wall? So he can see exactly where he is going. So the teachers basically set it up and say this is when your stuff has to be due in by.

INT: So Greg is into a set regime, is he?

KIRSTY: Say if he's got a unit of work like a science book and that's due in two weeks' time, we'll work out how much he has to do each day. If he wants to do science every day well then we say 'okay,

> you've got ten days' work of science. How many pages have you got in your science book? How many pages do you have to do each day?' And he'll work that out. If he wants to do only full days science a day, eight days and then if he decides he wants to do a block each day well that's something that he decides on, how he's going to complete his work. So that puts it all back on him and not just me saying 'Okay you have to do this much'. It's more that he's getting some practice at organising it.

Kirsty indicates that Greg's workload has increased markedly since the beginning of the year:

> He used to be getting through his work in about three hours at the start of the year. Now he actually has to come back in after lunch for about an hour and a half or an hour or so which is good for him. No, I'm pretty happy with what he's doing at the moment.

Greg has a much better idea this year, of his progress. "He knows what's going on because this year has taught him that and the responsibility is mainly his that he gets it done, done properly, well I don't know about the properly bit," Kirsty said. He does not appear to be too concerned about the marks as long as he gets the work done. When asked how he rated himself as a learner he said "about average". He indicated that his main problem was with reading.

English

Greg appears to read slowly and takes quite a while to get through the text. Greg suggests that he has difficulty with some of the English units and that he does not perform particularly well in this subject.

INT:	Okay. And what do you think your strengths and weaknesses are as a learner?
GREG:	Weaknesses in English.
INT:	So would you consider that both reading and writing?
GREG:	Reading.

Although he indicates that he is not a good reader and does not enjoy reading, Kirsty says that Greg has quite enjoyed some of the school novels he has read.

KIRSTY:	The last novel he read was last term. He really enjoyed the last book he read. That was the strange thing about it. He says 'oh can I read, can I read?' every ten seconds you know. I thought

'oh great, he's got into a novel, perhaps he might take another one up' but he didn't. I can't remember the name of this book but I've heard of it before and it's quite a good novel.

INT: Well I'm sure they do try and really target them.

KIRSTY: It was really suited to him. He could understand it and he could relate to it and I think the one that he's coming up to next is one that he can relate to again, which will be good.

In Greg's audio diary he enthuses about the book that Kirsty indicated would be the next one on the syllabus and Greg would probably enjoy it. "I'm reading this book in English. It's really interesting. It's about a little girl and she was living in a Sydney suburb. It's called *Beattie Bow*. It's a really good book". It may be that Greg is a good reader but just needs to practise more to improve his writing. Kirsty is keen for Greg to practise his writing skills and feels that perhaps the school should encourage this. She is particularly concerned about writing when he is doing the media and drama units:

KIRSTY: I might be a bit old fashioned in my view of English but to me if you've got a week or two weeks' media units and during that time he really doesn't do any writing, if you like, like story writing, journal writing it kind of just goes by the wayside. Even in the drama units as well. They're good units and they do a lot of good concepts but they also need I reckon something else within them. Especially with Greg on it anyway just to continually keep him writing. Because that's what he's fallen down in.

INT: Does he have to write a journal each day?

KIRSTY: No. He doesn't. That's why I did it with Shaun(inaudible) because I could see that, in his English sets there wasn't a huge amount of story writing, as I would expect in the Grade 6 to do a story once a week, or twice a week. And there wasn't so I thought 'Oh well, I'll get something happening about Greg.' It's a little bit different with Greg in that I've spoken to his English teacher about this as well and she didn't want him to do anything like that. Because he was reluctant to write in the first place she didn't want him to be doing, how shall I put it, to put him off English more I suppose, if he was forced to do a journal writing every day or a story writing or something like that. So she was happy with what he was producing and didn't want ... She thought the compulsion of a journal might just ... so I

thought 'Okay, fair enough, if you're happy with what he's producing then' ... you know.

Judging by his interview sessions and the audio diary he prepared, Greg's oral language lacks complexity:

KIRSTY:	Now what did you find hard or easy in your work today?
GREG:	Like English.
KIRSTY:	What did you find confusing about it?
GREG:	Trying to work out, get a paper thing that I said, what's it called, Kirsty?
KIRSTY:	The drama.
GREG:	The drama of it. And that was it.
KIRSTY:	What else did you find hard today? Any other confusing things that you found hard?
GREG:	No
KIRSTY:	Did you have any problems in maths today?
GREG:	No, only had two pages.
KIRSTY:	Okay what did you find interesting today? What have you learnt?
GREG:	I learnt that um, to calculate (inaudible) distances. And...
KIRSTY:	(inaudible)
GREG:	Yes. Today I learned about parts of my flowers, a flower and other bits and pieces.
KIRSTY:	Okay and what are you doing after school today?
GREG:	Not much. Probably going down the orchard again.

Maths

Greg has enjoyed working on maths units and indicates that it is his favourite subject. He generally likes the way the material is presented. He appears to need very little assistance in this area.

INT:	Now, so far this year, which subjects and units have you most liked studying?
GREG:	Maths.
INT:	Can you remember the unit?
GREG:	All of them.
INT:	All of them. So would that be your favourite subject?
GREG:	Yep.

INT: So what is it you most liked about it? Was it the materials? Or the information, or the teacher, or the assignments? Air lessons is not really relevant to you, or the communication technology?

GREG: All of that.

Social Studies

Greg needs Kirsty to assists with ideas and suggestions in his social studies. He finds it difficult to maintain concentration and motivation, when asked to analyse text or to write an essay length answer. He prefers the short answer questions as they suit his practical approach to learning. The subject material does not seem to be a problem, as he enjoys reading for the purpose of information gathering. On the day I visited Greg, he was working on a unit about the industrial revolution called *A Revolution in Manufacturing*. He found the short answer questions on the textile mills to be quite easy. However, he had difficulties with the letter he was required to write for the second part of the assessment. The task is described below:

> Question 2: Imagine that you are a disabled cottage worker who has lost his/her source of income. The reason for this is that a large mill has been built near your the village
> a) Write a short letter (about 1/2 page) to the local paper describing the problem. Explain how you made your money before the mill was built. You may have been a spinner, for example. (Remember that you are disabled and cannot move around much)
> b) In the second part of your letter describe your problem now that the mill has been built.
> c) Finish your letter by asking for work from anybody needing a reliable spinner.

Kirsty read the instructions with Greg and suggested, "You could say in here the machines have taken over my job. I have become redundant". Kirsty commented to him on the unit of work. "This is actually last week's work, isn't it?" Kirsty and Greg then had a discussion about the work and Kirsty indicated that he was behind in his lessons. Greg reassured her that everything was going well. Greg did not appear to be happy that Kirsty had questioned his progress. Kirsty turned her attention to Shaun. Greg found this task tedious and uninspiring and laboured over the writing. After ten minutes of writing he went down to the down to the bean bag with the dogs and a book.

Science

Greg worked on two science units the day I visited. One was looking at growth and he had to measure the amount that some of his seeds had grown. The second unit, which he did in the afternoon, involved an experiment on photosynthesis. Kirsty did not assist him with the first unit but she did with the second. If Kirsty is going to help him he would prefer that she discussed the steps in the experiment as he does them. Greg indicates that he can only work with a certain amount of information at one time. She is simplifying the

steps in the experiment, taking out the jargon, so that the instructions are clearer.

KIRSTY: Late one afternoon cover several leaves of your plant in alfoil so the sun will not reach the parts covered by the alfoil. After two o'clock the next day pick these leaves, remove the foil and stand them in boiling water for one minute to kill the (inaudible). Put the leaves in a jar and just cover them with methylated spirits to remove the chlorophyll. Do not use too much methylated spirits. Leave the jar in the cool place for twenty four hours until the leaves turn white. The methylated spirits dissolves out the green colour, that's the chlorophyll. (Inaudible) ... Remove the leaves from the methylated spirits. (Inaudible) ... as you will use it later. Wash the leaves in water ... (Inaudible) ... and cover them with iodine. Let stand for at least ten minutes ... half an hour ...

GREG: Well, first things first ,shall we.

KIRSTY: First things first. The first thing you have to do is to get your plant and cover a couple of leaves with alfoil so that no sun can ... that's the important bit. So you don't let ... (inaudible)

GREG: I can deal with that.

Greg speedily prepares the experiment and is then able to leave the classroom as it is the end of lessons for the day. In Greg's audio diary he comments on one of his science lessons:

> The plants, measuring plants was really good and all the other stuff in science, doing experiments. It was exciting to do. At least you get a bit of time to do it, not like in real schools where you have to really hurry the subject along.

Kirsty commented that he had been "really good" doing his school work on this particular day.

Conclusion

Greg is a quiet, independent and pragmatic student who does what has to be done to satisfactorily progresses through his school units. He has understanding and supportive parents who make school more palatable. Greg is not a keen scholar and makes no secret of the fact he would prefer to be in more practical pursuits on the station, rather than writing essays or reading novels. However, he accepts that literacy skills are essential and he takes an instrumental view of learning which is task orientated. In maths and science this pragmatic approach works well. There appear to be difficulties with analysis or concentrated engagement with text. He rarely goes beyond literal interpretations of the books or text. Although he is happy

to read for information, his reading practices do not enable him to read well and that is why he does not read for pleasure or entertainment.

CHAPTER 17
CASE STUDY 12: DAPHNE JEKICH

Helen House

Daphne and her family have been living on a small market garden at Mangrove, a semi rural area south of Perth. This property is now on the market and, when it is sold, the family members will move to various locations. Daphne's father will return to Croatia. The mother wants to move north of Perth to a beach-side suburb, Daphne may accompany her. Daphne's brother and sister will re locate in the Mangrove district. However, there is no certainty that Daphne will move with her mother as there have been some family problems over the past twelve months.

Daphne left her local high school in the middle of Year 10 in 1993 as she felt the standard of education was poor. She travelled to the eastern states, for a time, after leaving school and then returned to live in a Perth suburb with friends. Daphne's relationship with her mother had deteriorated and that was one of the reasons she did not return home. During this period, Daphne was on the homeless youth allowance and spent most of her time reading, watching television and "getting bored". It was during this period, Daphne heard about distance education from one of her parents' neighbours. They spoke positively about this mode of education so Daphne decided to make some enquiries to study with the Distance Education Centre. She made the decision to enrol with distance education at the end of 1993 and commenced in February 1994.

Mr and Mrs Jekich have three children and one grandchild. Eva is the eldest and is in her early twenties. She left school during Year 10 and has had a variety of jobs. She had plans to return to "tech to go further than she did". However, Eva has not returned to study and is presently unemployed and finding it difficult to get a job. Edward, 20, the only son, also left school during Year 10. Mrs Jekich took him out of school "because he had a lot of trouble with the teachers and he couldn't shut his mouth up, always bragging. He was the school bully, so I pulled him out". He now works part time at a couple of jobs and is interested to take some guitar lessons but does not want to return to school or "tech". Edward and his girlfriend have a five month old son and they spend most of their time at the Jekich home.

Daphne, the youngest, is sixteen and is an "A" student. She enjoys reading books, watching movies and horse riding. Daphne is a quietly spoken girl and during the interviews she kept her comments to a minimum. She has strong beliefs about certain aspects of her life, specifically her education and the amount of parental influence she will tolerate. In these areas she wants to maintain control of the decision making process.

Edward and Daphne work, part time, at the local abattoirs. Daphne packs rabbit, goat, emu and kangaroo meat for the export market. Daphne showed me a pamphlet of the cuts of meat that she packs and sends for export. She appears to be proud of this job and is interested in the industry.

Mr Jekich is Croatian and Mrs Jekich is Bosnian. Mrs Jekich can speak and understand six languages: Polish, German, Russian, Serbian, Croatian and English. The main language in the household is English although Mrs Jekich indicates, when she and her husband, are together they speak Croatian. She seems to be disappointed the children show little interest in the language.

> When the kids were little they speak much more of our language. They understand now, but they just don't speak. Mainly I speak English in the home, lot of time I speak our language, but they still understand. I'm going to teach my grandson to speak my language.

Mr Jekich was a student in Croatia after World War 11 and "did not have the opportunities for education that he sees in Australia". He did not enjoy education under the communist regime and left school at the end of primary school. He escaped from Yugoslavia in 1956 and fled to Germany to work. From there he migrated to Australia and worked "very far in the north on a station". Mr Jekich said he was the only member of the family in Perth and some other members of his family had migrated to Canada. Mrs Jekich suggests her husband's lack of formal education is due to lack of opportunity, not lack of ability.

MRS JEKICH:	He's very smart. His brother had bit education and he lives in Canada and he's engineer. He has six brothers and they sort of support themselves, they support each other. They couldn't support them because of very poor living conditions.
INT:	So given the opportunity, they would've gone on.
MRS JEKICH:	Yeah. Yeah. If had opportunity he would be very smart.

Mrs Jekich describes her occupation as "a cook". She finished high school in Bosnia and went on to get her diploma as a cook. She also did ten months of a typing course in Croatia after she left school. Since Mrs Jekich has been in Australia she has been occupied with the market garden and the children. She regrets that she has not practised her typing since she did her initial training.

Learning Environment

Daphne studies in her very organised and tidy bedroom. Her desk is neat and she has the distance education materials stacked up carefully. The materials that she is not using at present, or has completed, are stored in boxes under her desk. When I asked to see some examples of Daphne's school work she

was able to go straight to the appropriate box and readily find the material. She has a bookshelf in her room that contains her favourite Stephen King and Virginia Andrews books. She also has an Indian poster on the wall with the ten commandments of an Indian philosophy.

The Ten Commandments
Treat the earth and all that dwell there on with respect.
Remain close to the great spirit.
Show great respect for you fellow beings.
Work together for the benefit of all mankind.
Give kindness and assistance wherever needed.
Do what you know to be right.
Look after the well being of mind and body.
Dedicate a share of your efforts for the greater good.
Be truthful and honest at all times.
Take full responsibility for your actions.

We discussed the Indian commandments and the other Indian material Daphne had in her room. She bought most of it from a stall at the Fremantle markets. Daphne is interested in Indian history and admires their philosophy of life. She feels that they've "got it pretty right".

Daphne has done some ceramics and on the wall next to the poster she has a large display cabinet, full of eagles, that she has meticulously painted. She also has a collection of decorative plates, depicting eagles and large birds. Next to the cabinet she has a stereo system, a television and a video recorder. In the middle of her room underneath the window is her bed and this is where she sits and studies.

Daphne usually works on two subjects each day. She spends the morning on one subject and the afternoon on the other. Daphne appears to find this time-table more workable than the one suggested by the school, where the students work forty minutes on each subject, per day.

Aspirations

Mr and Mrs Jekich agree there were not the same opportunities for education when they were children in Europe. They feel there are great opportunities for education in Australia and they are keen for their children to take advantage of this. Mr and Mrs Jekich appear to have a strong work ethic and emphasise that "It's important for each person to have some kind of occupation, doesn't matter what".

Mrs Jekich is disappointed and somewhat resentful that her two older children dropped out of school early and appear to have little interest in returning to an educational institution. Mrs Jekich emphasises that all her children are "smart". However, the older two children have not made the most of their opportunities and she is critical of the education at the local high school.

> Mangrove is very rough. Mangrove really rough. Teachers very rough, school very rough, kids very rough. I always wish I did not send my kids to there. I always wish now I lived somewhere near the Nedlands (inaudible) I'm sure my kids would be probably still at school.

Mrs Jekich feels the children's educational opportunities and life chances have been disadvantaged because of the poor standard of education delivered at the high school in their area. She does acknowledge the children had some part to play in their lack of success, particularly Edward. "He was naughty as well, he was getting mixed up with the bad kids, that's the problem". She is now concerned their lack of education is limiting the older children's job prospects and, in Edward's case, the ability to properly care for his family

Mrs Jekich is keen for Daphne to achieve in the education system. It may be that Mrs Jekich wants Daphne to achieve where she did not have the opportunity herself. She goes on to say that Daphne has many opportunities "She is very smart she could do anything she wants to. She can be lawyer". Mrs Jekich asked the researcher to reinforce the importance of tertiary education during one of the interviews, as she is confident there are greater job opportunities for these graduates. Daphne and her mother discussed going to university or TAFE. Daphne did not appear to want to commit herself to a particular path at this stage. However, she is definite she does not want to be a teenage mother as, according to Daphne, are many of the other girls her age in Mangrove. "Everyone over 14 in Mangrove is pushing a pram". Mrs Jekich has offered to buy Daphne a car as an incentive for her to go to university. At this point in the discussion Mr Jekich interrupted and said:

> Now don't make promises that you can't keep. I can remember when I was a young boy and my father said if I did well at school he'd buy me a new pair of shoes and when I'd do well, and then come to him and say "I want the new shoes" he'd say "Why do you want shoes, it summer"? And so when the winter time came and I'd say to my father "And what about the shoes now"? My father would say, "Well you don't need shoes now because there are no snakes around".

Mrs Jekich assured her husband that this wasn't a problem. She had helped the other two children in the family buy a car and she was quite happy to help Daphne if it meant that she would go to university. As she put it:

> I really do want Daphne to have an education. I know it cost money, that no matter. I would support her as much as I could, (inaudible) nice dress for her, I would support her education because its very important.

Contact with School

Daphne works at the Distance Education Centre in Perth for two hours every Monday morning and that's the time if she's having "major problems," with a subject "that I can't work out," she asks the teachers for assistance. She enjoys going into the centre. She said the teachers are encouraging and positive towards the students. Her previous experience with teachers had given her a negative view of the profession.

> I was at Mangrove High School, that's the worst place, the teachers, no matter how good you're doing or anything they're, oh they're always down your throat trying to give you a kick up the back, like 'do better, do better' sort of thing. But distance education is totally different, like, they set you straight on how you're going and all that. When you listen to them it makes you feel better and you do better and that. Like at school it's just 'Oh well, they think I'm stupid, I'll be stupid', so...

Daphne also enjoys meeting and talking to the other students. She said that she's only required to study at distance education from 9.00 AM till 11.00 AM every Monday. However, on most Mondays she "ends up staying longer".

Mrs Jekich has little contact with the teachers as Daphne tends not involve her mother in her studies. When Daphne first enrolled at the Distance Education Centre she invited her mother to go with her and meet the teachers. Mrs Jekich has occasional contact with the teachers primarily to make sure that Daphne is going to school. As she said:

> When I enrol her, I speak to her teachers and ask if there are any problems that they know of. I ask them if Daphne not go to school. She tells me home she goes to school. I want to know and I ask them to let me know. You know what I mean?

Family Literacy Practices

Television and Radio

Mrs Jekich enjoys watching television when she has time:

> I like watching news, no. 1 for me, news especially about what's happening in my country what's happening over there. Then I watch Sundays, 60 Minutes. Then I watch Home & Away (*laughing*), I watch soapies if I have time I like that (*still laughing*).

She also enjoys watching *Donahue* and *Oprah Winfrey*. "There's a lot of good things she has about family, about kids, about all problems you can have. That's all", Mrs Jekich said. Mr Jekich watches the news in the evening with his wife. Mrs Jekich indicated that the other members of the family tended not to watch television together as "there is a television in each room" and "they

watch all the time". In the home there are four televisions and three video recorders.

> All four can be on and one will be watching sport, another one watching cricket and another will be watching what you call some other things. It's funny the tube. (*laughing*) Four televisions on.

Daphne has the television on while she studies but only really watches it for about "an hour or so in the night time". She enjoys the news, *Melrose Place* and *Home and Away*. Daphne said that sometimes "at work we all sit in the lunch room and talk about what happened on *Melrose Place*". Daphne indicates that she views television as a leisure activity and does not see the material as persuasive or influential. Occasionally, about once a month, Daphne and Edward will rent a Sega Megadrive.

Mr Jekich listens to the radio most of the time and will discuss some of the issues with Mrs Jekich. On a Wednesday evening a Croatian program is broadcast on the radio. "We listen to Croatian music", Mrs Jekich said, and it gives detailed information about activities in Croatia during the year. On the same program there is a community service segment that may be useful to Croatian families in Australia:

> [It] tells you also good places that you can go, like if you want to try to sell your house, if you want to make it sometimes, cabinets, who's the cabinet makers, who is fixing up your cars, things like that.

Time Spent Together

The Jekich family often have lunch and dinner together. Mrs Jekich tends to initiate the discussion at the table asking the family what they have been doing. As she explained:

> Really we talk, things we have to do and what's got to be done. We ask the kids questions, like what are you doing tomorrow, what's happening, asking Daphne, did you get reports from school, what's happening? What kinds of results, she bring it to me, read it to me. I have a look. And ask her what she has prepared and what she doing with so and so.

According to Mrs Jekich, her husband does not often get involved with discussions at the table.

Mrs Jekich indicated the family sometimes went shopping together. They occasionally went to the Croatian Club but Mrs Jekich is not comfortable there. "I don't really like going down there much" she said. "Don't like political stuff, that gets on my nerves. I don't like what's happening, with the home". However, she does enjoy "visiting friends and going for drives in the country". Mr and Mrs Jekich will sometimes take their boat to the beach and

have barbecues. In the summer ,the family has tended to stay home as there is lots of work in the market garden.

When the children were young they were involved with sporting clubs and they were talented athletes. Daphne did athletics for eight years. "I have trophies and medals. I have a room full of trophies and medals", said Mrs Jekich. There are many trophies in the house for netball and football. Unfortunately, Daphne no longer plays netball she "has trouble with her knees".

Mrs Jekich spends time talking to the children when they are about. She admits that she relies on Daphne for most of her information:

> A lot of information I'm getting through Daphne, she speaks English, she know television or she can read the books, so I just ask her. So I ask her for some of the help.

The family will discuss some of the issues in the newspaper. Initially, Mrs Jekich talked to the family about the war in "old Yugoslavia". "Now I don't feel like it," she said "because I get upset. It's very cruel. People sometimes are a little bit cruel"

Reading

Daphne is a keen reader and enjoys Stephen King and Virginia Andrews novels. She has most recently read the book *Dark Angels* by Virginia Andrews. She says she reads "a bit in her leisure time and then clarifies that and says "about one or two days a week". Daphne has about thirty novels on her bookshelf, mainly the favourite authors that she indicated. She buys her books at bookshops and second hand bookshops. There is a library in Mangrove, however, Daphne does not see the need to become a member.

Mrs Jekich enjoys light reading and will read at anytime of the day. As she explained:

> I like reading magazines. Other things, you know, papers, magazines. I don't read books. I used to read books when I was younger, in my language but I don't read books. Sometimes if it's something really important I will have to find out information, then I do go to a book. But I don't read 100% English. I still could read because we all know reasonable English, so I understand what's going on.

The Jekich family have a large dictionary that they refer to often. "Sometimes my husband don't understand words," she said, "so we get dictionary, look at the dictionary, and try and see what's what. But it helps a lot". Mrs Jekich and Eva have Mills and Boons books on the family bookshelf .

Mrs Jekich will look at books for recipes and Mr Jekich refers to books and instructions to identify the most suitable horticulture practices:

> Yeah. I look at them, my husband look at the books if he wants to read something, so he look to the old books to tell him exactly how to and what he has to and what kind of fertiliser he has to put down. How many weeks it takes to crop to be picked up. Stuff like that. He gets all time information from the books, he will go to books.

Writing

Daphne writes letters to three friends in Melbourne and Sydney, at least once a week. Mrs Jekich writes lists for shopping and to pay the bills so that she can organise her budget. She will sometimes leave a note for the family but feels self conscious about doing this because the children laugh at her spelling.

> I write in my language, they still understand. If I really have to, but now I'm too old to learn to writing good stuff. You feel so unvantaged. You know you can't do something about it, you can't write. I should've learned English when I was younger when I come here. It's too late now.

If Mrs Jekich needs to have a letter written she asks one of the children to write it for her. If the children are not home she will go to a neighbour for assistance. "It's really hard," she said. With the other members of the family, writing appears to be a popular pastime. Mr Jekich writes many letters to his family and friends in Croatia. Eva is a keen correspondent to the many friends she met when she was overseas last year. Mrs Jekich indicates that Edward "writes very good things" and does not elaborate.

What is Distance Education Like for the Family

Mrs Jekich does look at some of Daphne's distance education lessons. "I really can't help her because I'm not good at English", she said. She finds it difficult to understand them and needs to ask Daphne for assistance. It is important for Mrs Jekich to know how Daphne is progressing "So she read it to me. I say read it to me, comments, so she read it to me". She is pleased Daphne is doing well on distance education.

Mrs Jekich did not think that school work had changed a great deal since she was at school. However, the delivery is different and she would not be able to assist Daphne with her lessons, particularly maths

MRS JEKICH:	It's impossible. I couldn't help her my own way and her way is completely different. It's same thing but they were different.
INT:	You come to the same result. It would be a different method, perhaps.
MRS JEKICH:	You write no. 7 in European way, I learn the 7, that's no. 7 (*Mrs Jekich writing it down*) you people write here, just this. That's it.

INT: With that line across it.

MRS JEKICH: Or you know, stuff like that. You say Sarich, we don't say Sarich, we can't say, Sharich. S on this figure, that's Sh-Sharich.

INT: So the difference between European schooling and...

MRS JEKICH: Oh yeah. Lots of maths. Not so much history, but maths, very good for Australians.

Daphne works four days a week at home by herself. On Mondays she works at school. She spends about six and a half hours each day on her studies, sometimes more. She does not have a regular timetable but she makes sure she gets the required work completed. School work is a priority and leisure activities are of secondary importance, to be fitted in "around my schoolwork".

Daphne works with the television on all the time. On the day I visited there was a rather gripping movie about a custody battle between a mother and father. Daphne took little notice of the television and was able to concentrate without any problems. She rarely rings the teachers as she is able to discuss problems when she visits the Distance Education Centre. Daphne finds that she works most of the difficulties out herself. When asked if she missed the social contact with her peers at high school, Daphne said:

DAPHNE: Oh, I used to spend a lot of time at Mangrove but now my friends have gone. You know, still got a few friends that.

INT: Right, actually you commented about the sorts of kids who were at Mangrove.

DAPHNE: Bad.

INT: You're pleased that you're not involved in that.

DAPHNE: Yeah, oh, they're all Mums now.

Daphne does most of her work in her bedroom on her bed. She has a large bookcase in the house where she keeps "social studies and science books and that". The resource materials that come from distance education with the subject units are the most useful books in terms of learning:

> Yeah, like they, with most of the questions they give you, like in social studies, you know, they give you three or four sets and that, and like extra information in that.

Marie is Daphne's co-ordinator at the Distance Education Centre and they have a very close working relationship. She is arguably Daphne's greatest confidante and resource. Marie's support and encouragement has played an important role in Daphne's success on distance education.

Learning Practices

Daphne is a practical and intellectually capable student who appears to work peacefully and methodically through her units. She indicates that her attitude to school and learning style has changed since she has been studying with distance education:

DAPHNE:	Got to be done, you know.
INT:	You've got a very practical approach to it haven't you?
DAPHNE:	Mmm.
INT:	So when you were at high school did you have pretty much the same view?
DAPHNE:	No, totally different life than the life. I want to be with my friends and all that.
INT;	Right, so it's really totally different ...
DAPHNE:	Because I had the choice of like, I'd go with my friends and do things with them or you know, sit in the classroom and all of that. That's still happened now, but I don't know, it's a lot different now.

Daphne believes that she is "about average" as a learner, although it would appear, by her marks and comments from the teachers, she is better than that. When she was asked what she thought her strengths were as a learner, she indicated her reading skill and her ability "to think" were her greatest learning attributes. Daphne also has good powers of concentration and can work for long periods without a break She was not sure about her speaking and listening ability. "I don't know, "she said. "Like I do a lot myself except at school".

Her reading and writing skills are highly developed and she has no problems understanding the work requirements. She is a quick reader and is able to solve problems independently, although, she does admit the most complex reading tasks she does in a week are for her "school reading". Often, if she has had difficulty with a unit, she will do "homework" and practice the skills or reinforce the information that she found difficult. She knows how well she is doing by talking to the other students, discussion with teachers and the marks she receives for the units.

Distance Education Subjects

On the day I visited Daphne she was working on two subjects she enjoyed, science and social studies. She was quite happy for me to sit in her bedroom and observe her working. As there is no home tutor in this situation there is no dialogue while Daphne is doing her work.

Science

Daphne is working on *Unit 5.1, Biological Field Studies, Book 2, Classifying the Living World.* This unit had the following objectives for the student.

> By the time you work through this book, you should be able to:
> - recognize structural and behavioural adaptations
> - explain the classification system based on structural features of plants and animals
> - identify West Australian examples of the major animal phyla
> - distinguish between tracheophytes and other plants
> - distinguish between monocotyledons and dicotyledons
> - identify Western Australian examples of some native plant families.

Daphne said she is interested in science and enjoys the material. The book is clearly set out and she understands the tasks required for her to complete this part of the unit. She looks at the vocabulary she will have to become familiar with to complete the unit. At the end of each section there is a small revision exercise to make sure the main points and vocabulary have been internalised before moving onto the next section. For example, at the end of section on *Adaptations* ,the revision question is:

> Can you tell what kind of adaptation these are: behavioural or structural?
> Possums are nocturnal, Ducks have oily feathers.

There are eight examples given and Daphne answers them correctly. Questions in later sections reinforce material covered in earlier sections. It took Daphne two hours to finish this book. She spent one and a half hours before lunch and half an hour after lunch. She checked the answers in the back of the book when she had finished. Daphne has been chosen to represent distance education in a science workshop at the zoo. Marie indicates that Daphne is seen, by her teacher, as an interested and capable science student.

Social Studies

As Daphne enjoys analysing material she finds the reading and writing requirements of this subject interesting and enjoyable. She has been particularly interested in the current topic. *Australia in the International Community Year 10 Lesson 12.* This is the last of three lessons covering the Year 10 Social Studies Unit *"Australia in the International Community"*. There are sections on Australia's:

> Trade
> Aid Programme
> Immigration Policy
> Cultural Exchange

Daphne and I discussed Australia's markets and trade policies. She was able to relate her studies to the products she prepares and packs for export in the abattoir.

Although I did not observe Daphne doing all her subjects, she discussed their format and what she thought of the material in mathematics, health and English.

Maths

Daphne finds the maths materials difficult and it takes "time to work them out". She implied that she spends more time on maths than her other subjects. "I like Maths but it drags on, it's a bit boring", she said. The unit that she is working on has five papers and each paper has approximately 78 pages. One paper is to be sent to her teacher every fortnight. The maths teacher suggests that students do an hour of maths per day. Daphne disregards this advice and timetables maths into a half day session.

Health

This is Daphne's favourite subject and she has had very positive feedback. On her last unit she got an "A" and the teacher's comments were very encouraging:

> Daphne has completed excellent work throughout this course. She thoroughly deserves her outstanding grade.

Daphne is pleased with her performance and explains, "it helps if you like a subject because then you learn from it. I just loved all the topics". She has now finished that part of the syllabus and needs to decide whether to continue with Health units or do some vocational training through work experience. Daphne would be quite interested to do work experience at a doctor's surgery.

English

Daphne enjoys her English units, although the novels are often quite different from her normal reading preference. To be good at English "you need to have a sound vocabulary and be a good speller" according to Daphne. I did not discuss specific units with Daphne and so there is little information on her English units. However, when I visited her working at the Distance Education Centre she was studying *Pygmalion* by herself, and finding it extremely boring and tedious. It is difficult studying plays by this mode because literature, as a subject requires students to interpret the text to construct their own personal meaning and show how classical texts represent themes of everyday life, still valid today. Today students are also expected to recognise the values and ideologies constructed by literary texts.

Conclusion

Daphne is a highly motivated and academically able student. The distance mode of education provides her with the opportunity to study independently and still receive encouragement and support where appropriate. She has a clear understanding of what is required in each subject and how to manage the task oriented framework Her ability "to think" and work problems out for herself is a significant asset to a student that does not have a home tutor. Her regular visits to the Distance Education Centre enable her to develop a positive attitude toward this type of education.

Many of her present skills may be as a result of her experience of distance education. She has learned to manage her own time and organise her own learning. Unlike many distance education students, Daphne does not rely on family support for her learning. Her most effective emotional and practical support comes from her relationship with her school co-ordinator, Marie.

Postscript

This case study has been developed from interviews and observations during August and September 1994. The family home was sold at the end of September and Daphne departed in early October for the eastern states. Marie was notified of Daphne's plans only a couple of days before she left. Marie received a letter from Daphne, in mid-October, giving her an address where distance education material could be sent. Daphne reassured Marie that she would continue with her studies. Enclosed with this letter was an English unit Daphne had finished and wanted marked.

I contacted Mrs Jekich and Daphne in April 1995. Daphne is now working in a ceramics factory and living with her mother in a beach-side suburb south of Perth. Daphne had no plans to return to school at this stage.

CHAPTER 18
CASE STUDY 13: STEPHANIE KELLY

Helen House

Loretta Hill is a 400,000 hectare property on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert. The station had been abandoned for about twenty years until the Kelly family took it up in the 1980s. The Kellys have worked very hard in the years they have been at Loretta Hill to restore this cattle station to working order. They now run approximately 3,000 head of cattle on the property. The conditions in this area are harsh, the temperature hovers around 50 degrees Celsius in the summer and there has been no significant rain since 1987. Mr Kelly built the new homestead, by himself, in 1989. It is a light, airy, non-airconditioned, transportable building, simply furnished, set on a hill overlooking the expansive property. There are many interesting old buildings around the homestead and there is a very attractive garden with lawn and shrubs. Animals play a large role in the life of the station and there are pens containing horses, chooks, ducks and guinea fowl. The nearest town is more than 100 kilometres away by unsealed road.

Mr and Mrs Kelly have four children: Stephanie (Year 7), Linda (Year 5), Vicki (Year 3) and Will (Year 2). The children do their schooling with school of the air and distance education materials. The two older girls are mature and capable when it comes to their school work and their station duties. Vicki and Will, on the other hand, find the activities on the station more interesting and stimulating than their school work. Vicki is particularly fond of the ducks and chickens. She cuddles them and includes them in many of her games. Will is a gregarious little boy and enjoys talking and playing with the dog and his sisters. The four children obviously enjoy their station life activities such as mustering, rock collecting, playing in the cubby, trampolining and picnics in the bush.

Stephanie has a strong commitment to Loretta Hill and the way of life she experiences on the station. During my visit, Stephanie mentioned her interest and desire to return to "the olden days". Her project at present is to make some olden days clothes to wear. "I am trying to make an olden days dress because I am sick of new day clothes". Stephanie is a sensitive and creative child who has a great love and appreciation of the world around her. She will be attending boarding school in Perth for her secondary education.

Mrs Kelly enjoyed her time at school and completed Year 12. At the end of her schooling, in suburban Adelaide, she thought about training as a teacher. However, she decided that she had "enough of studying" and went to work as a governess. Mrs Kelly has spent most of her time "in the bush" since then. She has developed a great deal of knowledge about educating children in

isolated areas, and is pleased that she now has the opportunity to pass this knowledge on by teaching her own children. Mrs Kelly finds teaching "very satisfying" and prefers to employ someone to help with the housework than to employ a governess.

School was not "a happy experience" for Mr Kelly. He is originally from New South Wales and spent his childhood there. When he left school, at thirteen, he moved around the country, working in a variety of jobs. He has spent most of his adult life working in the Kimberley, as head stockman on a number of large cattle stations. Mr Kelly was keen to get his own station in the north. In partnership, with his brother, he was able to take up the lease on Loretta Hill. This has provided the opportunity to build a run-down station into a viable financial enterprise for his family.

The Kelly family appear to provide most of the labour on this property. The older girls are expected to do mill runs and to assist with the mustering. The two younger children do odd jobs and help Mrs Kelly with many station chores. At present the mustering is done by vehicles but, as the children get older, Mr and Mrs Kelly plan to do the muster with horses. The children are looking forward to this stage in their life and to further developing their significant horse skills. Schooling is postponed for the three week to five weeks of the muster as the family are out working on various parts of the station.

Learning Environment

The school room at Loretta Hill is at the end of the kitchen. It is a small area and it is difficult to move between the pieces of furniture. There is one kitchen size table, two children's desks, one large cupboard for school of the air and distance education materials. The radio sits on a small table about a metre from the study area, towards the kitchen. There is no dividing wall between the school room, the kitchen and the dining room. The children's school work is not displayed on the walls. There is a dictionary on the table where Stephanie and Linda do their work. Occasionally, Stephanie does her school work on the dining room table.

The children have a set timetable for school. The school day begins at 6.30 AM and Mrs Kelly tutors the children. Language and maths is scheduled for the first two hours as she considers these to be the "most difficult subjects" and they are best done while the children are fresh. They have "smoko" at 8.30 AM and the children have a break. Stephanie indicated that she did language for the first two hours and then tended to do an hour of maths after smoko. The other subject that she does is social studies and would work on that for about an hour. When I asked Stephanie about Science she said that her mother had sent the science book back and she only did the air lessons. There are two weeks of air lessons, on science, in term 2 and four weeks in term 3. Mrs Kelly does not do art because it is too difficult and there is not enough time. The children finish their lessons by 11 00 or 11.30 AM.

At times, the children will work over the weekends, as Mrs Kelly likes to have the lessons finished by "Melbourne Cup Day" in early November. The hottest

months at Loretta Hill are November and December and she finds it is just "too hot for school". The weather cools a little in January and she will begin classes again then.

The four children have air lessons and move to sit at the radio when it is their turn. The day I visited the family, the children had social studies air lessons. There was a strong easterly wind and there was a lot of static which made it difficult to hear the teacher and he had difficulty hearing the children. The proximity of the radio to the school area appeared to create problems as the children not on air are distracted by the lesson.

Aspirations

"Stephanie is very keen about station life and so is Linda," Mrs Kelly said. "Vicki will probably be a freelance photographer so she can do whatever she likes". Mrs Kelly believes that "Vicki is an individual and disappears for hours with the chooks and in many ways is still too young for formal education". She would like to see the children finish their schooling and, if appropriate, continue on to TAFE or University.

> If they want to go. I certainly wouldn't force them to go. Just because, you know, I wouldn't force them to go to university just for the sake of saying 'I've been to university'. I don't think it does them any good in the end. Yet if they want to go ... (inaudible) ... they'll get as much support ...

Mrs Kelly is not sure what the future holds for the children. She thinks Stephanie will live in the bush, on the station. However, Mrs Kelly wonders what Stephanie will think of Perth when she goes to boarding school next year.

> It's very hard to plan ahead these days. Like Stephanie might hit Perth next year and she might think its fabulous. I don't think so though. You never know do you?

Mrs Kelly believes that Stephanie, Linda and Will are progressing quite well with their school work. "Stephanie battles with maths but language she breezes through" She is not so sure about Vicki, who she says "is very intelligent but doesn't like school".

Contact with School

Mrs Kelly has a lot of contact with the school. "We've got a 008 number," she said. "I'm always on it". She is supportive of the staff at the school of the air.

> Our headmaster it's his third or fourth year, and he's really good and we've just got a new lot of teachers this year and they are really good and they sort of just become like friends to the kids. Not teachers.

The Kelly children have daily contact with the school of the air through the air lessons and Mrs Kelly has the opportunity to ask questions and sort out problems. "All the set work the children do comes from distance education," she said, and then "we send it in to school of the air to be marked". The Principal and Vice Principal of the Distance Education Centre visited the Kelly family early in 1994, with the President of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association. Mrs Kelly indicated the visit was very useful. "Actually, it was good that they came up," she said. "Opened their eyes up a bit".

Stephanie talks by telephone to the teachers "about once a week" and guesses that her mother makes the contact "about 10 times a day". Stephanie talks to her teacher, Mr Garvey, from time to time, as he may want to talk to her about a story she has written and clarify some of the words. When I asked Stephanie if she had enjoyed seeing her teachers at camp, she said "they are good but they are a bit bossy".

Family Literacy Practices

Television and Computers

Loretta Hill does not have a satellite dish, and so the family watches video tapes on their television. Mr and Mrs Kelly decided not to get a dish as they did not want the children to watch too much television. The family only watch videos at night, when the power plant is on, or "when it rains". Friends send family video programs for the Kellys to watch. Mr and Mrs Kelly enjoy sport, particularly AFL football. The children enjoy watching the cricket and movies. The school of the air teachers also send out some videos for the family to watch. Mrs Kelly said the family often listened to the radio as the reception is very good. Stephanie indicated that she watched the television every night if she had time. Her favourite programs are *The Young Riders* and *The Man From Snowy River*. She talks about the programs a little with Linda but Vicki and Will are not very interested in horses. Stephanie finds that the television material depicting the "olden days" has had a big impact on her.

INT:	What do you think when you watch things on television or when you watch things on a video. Do you think they make you believe things about the world?
STEPHANIE:	Yes.
INT:	You do.
STEPHANIE:	Specially something old day adventure - I sort of like want to
INT:	So in the olden days' adventures you think you'd like to go back there? ... cause it's more fun?
STEPHANIE:	Yeah. Most people reckon the new days are much better than the old days because you get killed in the new days and the old days you were much stronger.
INT:	Right

STEPHANIE: I wouldn't be alive these days if it wasn't for horses or the water.

The television is more popular in this family than the computer. Mrs Kelly describes the computer as "the dreaded computer" and is "a time waster". Working with the computer at present is a burden in this household. Although the unit is solar powered "it often runs out of power and you have to go down to the lighting plant. It all takes time". It would appear Mrs Kelly has concerns about the introduction of computers. Stephanie has adopted a similar view to her mother:

> I probably learn more from sets and books and dictionaries than the computer. Because I haven't really learned nothing from the computer yet.

Despite Stephanie's negative attitude, Mr Garvey indicates Stephanie has written some "very interesting" stories on the computer. The family also admit that they play *Wheel of Fortune* on the computer and enjoy the activity.

Reading and Writing

Mrs Kelly "reads a lot". "I read anything that is not rubbish," she said. Wilbur Smith used to be Mrs Kelly's favourite author but she has "read enough of his now" and prefers other authors. The librarian in the settlement north of Loretta Hill provides an interesting selection of books for the family. Mrs Kelly indicates that all the family like reading and they borrow a number of books. Mr Kelly refers to books quite often as he is interested to identify the birds and animals on the property. As Mrs Kelly explained:

> If he comes home and sees a strange bird that he doesn't know, he'll look up a bird book which is a really good bird book. And if any strange little animal. We have lots of reference books here.

Stephanie enjoys reading and she feels that her best reading years were in Years 4 to 6. She is now too busy and does not "have enough time to read". When Stephanie does get a chance to read, she enjoys Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl and "books that have got adventure in them". At present she is reading the book *From Billabong to London.* She gets most of her books from the library or for her birthday. Stephanie indicates that she is not keen on writing and she gets "annoyed by it sometimes". She writes a few letters and they take a long time to write. Stephanie has a diary but does not write in it each day. "I keep forgetting," she said.

Mrs Kelly has not written a letter since the telephone was connected eight years ago. She does keep a diary "about what happens on the station, which is usually about two months out". Most of the office work is done by Mrs Kelly, and she sends the computing work to her brother-in-law. He is a partner on the property and a "computer enthusiast".

Time Spent Together

Mrs Kelly indicates that the family do "everything" together:

Yeah, we're together all the time really. Like any time I go out and help Roy, which is, you know, a lot, then the kids come. No, we're together a lot. And also when I'm pottering around the garden and things like that, you can talk. I must admit, I don't do any, which I should, I don't do any structured things much with the children. Like I'd never sit down, very rarely do I sit down and play a game with them and I must admit and I've never done it, I've never read to them. I read to them with school.

The family tend to discuss activities around the station and the work that has to be done. The children very rarely go to town and Mr and Mrs Kelly only go when it is a necessity.

MRS KELLY: I hate going to town with Roy and he hates it so we sort of.....

INT: So you'll go in if there's something that has to be done?

MRS KELLY: Yes to do a bit with the bank manager. I've got to go in next week. I take Stephanie in once a month to go to the orthodontist and I sort of make that my shopping time.

What is Distance Education like for the family?

Mrs Kelly enjoys her involvement with her children's education. However, she emphasises this type of learning does put most of the responsibility for the children's education onto the home tutor. At times it is necessary to query and question this type of learning mode. It is "important to know where you are at," she said:

> I really worry though - I don't get too stressed out about school because you can give yourself a nervous breakdown. I really do worry about and I suppose you sort of worry you know Stephanie is going to go away next year. Is she educationally wise? Is she going to cope? I wonder sometimes if these sets that they do, whether it is going to be adequate. Because last year she did one of these standardised tests and she reads a lot and I was quite shocked with her comprehension. She had a comprehension thing and I was quite shocked. She really didn't understand the passage at all. She did, but she couldn't answer the questions and in the set work they do a lot of oral comprehension where they ask questions and she could answer that quite well and I sort of know when you answer you go 'oh', 'ah', 'um' and I could understand her but actually putting it down on paper she really struggled. So I got onto Ian, the Headmaster, and he

sent out , what's it called - oh *'Reading Between the Lines'* and I'm really rapt on that and the kids have all got it now and they do everything in that. Reading, times tables and graphs and it's really improved Stephanie's comprehension and Linda's too. And I just think how set work sort of fails on that. Perhaps it's also the one-to-one whereas in the school you've got to struggle to understand, don't you?

Whereas Mrs Kelly was concerned about the emphasis on oral communication and lack of writing for the older children. She feels there is a "lot of writing" for the lower grades. She also expressed concern about "a new language course".

MRS KELLY: There's a little bit too much actually, especially in the younger grades. Also, I feel that they've just brought in - this must be the third year its been in - they brought in a new language course for Grade 1. They started it off in Grade 1 and then last year Grade 2 was introduced. Next year Grade 3 will be introduced and I personally think that is inappropriate and that's just not only my views either. When I put Vicki back into Grade 1, I started off in Set 7 and I thought maybe it's just me, and then I started talking to a few other mothers and nobody is very happy with it at all, and it sort of came out at the end of the year that none of the kids could read. And Will was on it last year but he was sort of a bit on a modified one.

INT: But at the end of Grade 1 none of them could read?

MRS KELLY: Not one Grade 1 kid could read. Will could only because I sort of modified it a bit and put a few of my own things in.

INT: So for Will to read, you actually changed it?

MRS KELLY: It's very airy fairy and I feel - they have changed it a bit but I still don't think they've changed it enough. But we're lucky. We've got a good headmaster and he's just modified it completely and I was trying to explain to the Principal and Vice Principal of DEC that it would probably work fine in a school room situation but out here on a one to one thing it just doesn't work at all. Apparently the Grade 2 one is just as inappropriate and I can't comment on the Grade 3 one because I haven't seen it. There were quite a few other mothers from [another school of the air] and they couldn't see what all the fuss was about but we are the only school of the air that does

> standardised testing and it showed up in the standardised testing that this ... I was pretty anti the standardised testing, too, and I'm not anymore.

Mrs Kelly suggested that some of the work the children send in does not really indicate whether they are having problems or not:

> See that's another thing with kids in isolation - you really don't know sort of ... Like take Vicki, and she really does have problems, but all the work that she sends in with her set work just comes out fine, you know, sort of as though she's got no problems at all. She has, but her teacher is very aware of that.

Suggestions for Distance Education

Mrs Kelly expressed three concerns about distance education materials. First, she was concerned that distance education might "market their courses overseas". If this were to happen, she thought that they would "totally disregard the needs of the bush kids". She felt that the emphasis would change if courses were marketed to other countries. This issue had been discussed at school of the air seminars and Isolated Children's Parents' Association meetings. Second, Mrs Kelly expressed some scepticism about the importance of educational philosophy. "How important is philosophy in teaching kids to read?" she said. More attention should be paid to the practical task of "getting kids to read". Mrs Kelly's third concern was the possibility of over-emphasis on technology. "Money into technology is not necessarily the answer" to improving distance education materials, she argued. Technology can be expensive to operate and she was concerned that distance education might adopt a "user pays" policy for services in the future. She was also concerned about the reliability of services. "Technology is great if it works," she said. Mrs Kelly would prefer to see the money put into texts and other resources.

Management

Mrs Kelly organises the children's school work each day from 6.30 AM to 11.30 AM. The children do language, maths and social studies. They take between nine and twelve days to complete ten days of distance education work, depending on station commitments It is sometimes necessary to adjust the timetable. There are days when school work has to take second place to the station. Occasionally Mrs Kelly will go out on the station and "just have to leave it". This means that deadlines are not always met.

Mrs Kelly suggests the most difficult aspect of distance education is not the educational jargon. It is getting started on the lessons each day, that is the problem:

> No the educational jargon doesn't really worry me. I find it hard to, well, I don't find it hard any more because you've just got to do it, to knuckle down, just get up in the morning and think school. I don't suppose I do find it hard. But Tara's only been here a couple

> of weeks. I must ... alright ... because Tara does my housework for me now but sometimes it's a bit hard to sit here.

At present Mrs Kelly has Tara helping her with the household duties. However, she has only been with the family for two weeks so Mrs Kelly cannot feel the benefit of her assistance as yet. The difficulty Mrs Kelly highlights prior to Tara's arrival was balancing the numerous demands on her time.

Supervision is demanding with four children and Mrs Kelly indicates it is difficult to spend sufficient time with each child. Stephanie and Linda have developed a positive learning style and they do not demand as much assistance as Vicki and Will:

> Stephanie and Linda don't need much supervision for their language exercises. I just explain what has to be done and they go ahead and do it. Stephanie and Linda have got very good attitudes towards school. They just get in and do it. The sooner they get it done the sooner it's finished. Vicki hasn't twigged to that yet. Vicki needs a lot of supervision and so does Will, but because he's only in Grade 2.

Despite the difficulties, Mrs Kelly is very positive about her role as a home tutor. She suggests that next year, when Stephanie goes to boarding school, will be an indication of how successful she has been as a home tutor:

> Well I hope that I've done a good enough job for her to be able to cope with the work in Year 8 - you know - if she goes to school and she can't cope with the work, well it's a reflection on the way I've taught her really isn't it. She's got to go. I don't want her to go but she's got to go for her own good.

School Practices

Stephanie has an instrumental view of learning and takes the pragmatic approach to her work. She has good verbal and well developed written skills and enjoys tasks that involve reading. She has developed some independent learning skills but still needs the home tutor if she finds a difficulty. Stephanie tends not to try and work out problems for herself. If the home tutor is working with the younger children, Stephanie can stay on task. She will help the younger children with their work if it is appropriate. Stephanie knows how she is going with her studies, from the marks and comments she receives from her teacher:

INT: Now when you do your work, how do you know how you're going with your school work? Is it from teachers' marks? Do you send things in to school to be marked?

STEPHANIE: Yeah and he does send it back. Well I get a bit ... in maths but not exactly well because I got 100% but when I got my exam in maths I was really really ... (inaudible)

INT: And that was from the mark you noticed that? Right. And what about the teachers' comments? Do they, do you know how you're going? Do they say 'well done Stephanie' and 'keep it up'?

STEPHANIE: Yeah but they usually say 'please try harder' or something. Maths is a bit of a hard thing to do.

The units that Stephanie has enjoyed this year have been in English:

INT: And is there a particular unit you like studying in language?

STEPHANIE: ...I've got this book and it's called *Spell a Word* and it's more better than reading.

INT: *Spell a Word*, okay.

STEPHANIE: Probably language and *Spell a Word*. Actually in the *Spell a Word* there are units but what I do it's probably like homework to me than spelling. I'll take ... because I think it's fun to do.

Mr Garvey indicated that Mrs Kelly has introduced some commercial books for Stephanie's language program after consulting the staff at the school of the air. Mrs Kelly uses *Reading between the Lines, Spell a Word* and *Comprehension Sets*. She felt there needed to be more variety in the language materials than the texts offered through the school of the air.

Stephanie enjoys social studies particularly when it is about "the bush" or "horses". She was explaining to the interviewer her favourite activity she had done in Year 6. The project required Stephanie to pick a farm or station, describe the place and draw pictures. She told me what she had written about her station:

> Used to be a sheep station and the cattle station was run down before we came and fixed up the mills. We had to put stock on it. We worked very hard. We got workmen so it is easier and when we started school we helped dad less. One drought year we had lots of poddy calves and lots of them died. We had names for some of the calves.

The day I visited Loretta Hill, Mrs Kelly and the children were recovering from the flu so the children were on a modified timetable. Stephanie, Linda and Vicki were working at the large table and Will was working at one of the desks. The family did their language lessons and social studies air lessons and then finished their lessons for the day at about 10.30 am. However, Stephanie and Mrs Kelly did make some comments about the maths.

Maths

Stephanie and Mrs Kelly do not enjoy working on the Maths lessons. Mrs Kelly indicated that the Year 7 Maths was too difficult and not practical. She questions how relevant some of the material is to everyday life:

MRS KELLY:	Well it's not a difficulty I don't suppose but I really don't think it's changed for the better because, especially, well not so much in language, it's the maths that, well Stephanie is learning things that I learnt but she seems to be learning things that I learnt in high school. I'd be lost with Stephanie's maths if I didn't have an answer book.
INT:	What I find is methods of getting to an answer are so different.
MRS KELLY:	I find that they do a lot of things that I can't see much point of but they don't give enough time to things like the basics you know.
INT:	So everyday maths perhaps there's not enough.
MRS KELLY:	Yes, there's not enough. I found at school I was hopeless at maths. I really was. It wasn't through want of trying. Things didn't click with me.
INT:	I can relate to that.
MRS KELLY:	Somewhere along the line I must have had ...
INT:	Well that's a critical thing too isn't it - having the right people
MRS KELLY	Because now that I'm older and can apply (inaudible) it clicks now and I think this is one of the problems with maths, they teach them all these abstract things but the kids can't then put it into use until really they're adults and I think that's one of the failings ... And if they don't have that grounding well they won't be able to put it to use.

Ian, the Principal of the school of the air has developed a modified program based on material from the Goldfields. Mrs Kelly and Stephanie find this program to be more "user friendly" and appropriate. Mrs Kelly has also added some of her own maths material for Stephanie to use.

Language

Stephanie begins her day with Language. She was working on two projects during the morning. The first piece of work was in *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow(Year 7 Set 11 day 7*). Stephanie was asked to write a job application to accompany a balloonist on a Trans Australian flight. Stephanie worked on

this project for about half an hour and Mrs Kelly gave some suggestions. The second language activity was developing a time line of her life. Mrs Kelly was assisting her with suggestions from time to time.

STEPHANIE: When I was six years old I started grade one.

MOTHER: What year was that? (Mother then turns to work with Vicki.)

MOTHER: What else happened in 1988? We had an extremely good year. What did we have an abundance of and I took a photo as a result of the rain we had lots of ?

STEPHANIE: Wildflowers.(Mother turns back to Vicki)

The following piece is part of the finished document.

1989 new homestead built.
1990 to 1993 we had a terrible drought.
In 1992 we brought three hundred cows from Mangara Station.
Had good winter rains in 1993.
1994 its very dry again and I'm in year seven and breaking in horse, Activity
1994 bought two cows from Narram Station

Stephanie's teacher indicated that this piece was "well written" and he gave her a "big effort" sticker. Mr Garvey indicated that Stephanie is "a brilliant writer". She can present a detailed argument and describes characters vividly. Here is an example of her work:

Doctor Golly

Hi, my name is Doctor Golly.
I'm big, brown and white St Bernard Dog.
I am going to tell you about my life since I was a pup.
My mother Delmonico is a St Bernard dog.
Our owner was a 50 year old lady.
I was born on a sunny afternoon with my sister Choco.
Three weeks past and we were growing fast.
One day mum, Choco and I were playing in the garden when a car drove up and a little girl jumped out.
Our owner Mrs Deli came out and walked up to the little girl and brought her to where we were waiting.
Mrs Deli said to us "This is my 8 year old grand daughter Priscilla, she has come to live with us"
Priscilla was wearing a green tartan dress and long brown hair.
"Grandmother what are the dogs name?" asked Priscilla.
Mrs Deli said "This is Delmonico the mother, and this is Choco and Dr Golly, the pups.
If you like you can have Dr. Golly and Choco".
"Yes, I will have them. Oh thank you Grandmother". said Priscilla

"Priscilla would you like to come with me and the dogs to an outing down to the park?" asked Mrs Deli
So they all went for a walk down to the park. Next day they went for a picnic at the park, where Priscilla got to know her two new pups and they got to know her.
The End

Social Studies

Stephanie had her school of the air lesson at 9.00 AM for half an hour. Mr Garvey had indicated to the children that they would not have their normal social studies on this day. It appeared that Stephanie had forgotten as she was prepared with her *Social Studies Air Pad (Year 7 Term 3 Chapter One).* She was a little disappointed they were not having a proper lesson, as she was looking forward to the discussion about archaeology. However, Mr Garvey explained that the lesson would change today as there was a special visitor. The children would be talking to Jarred, a middle aged man with cerebral palsy. He had an interesting story to tell as he was travelling around Australia in a motorised wheel chair.

Mr Garvey welcomed Stephanie and the two other children to the lesson. The reception was poor and Jarred's speech was difficult to understand so the lesson was far from easy. Each child was asked to prepare a question to ask Jarred about his trip. Stephanie had already prepared one question and she thought of another one during Jarred's talk.

STEPHANIE:	Hi.
JARRED:	Yes, Stephanie.
STEPHANIE:	How far, many kilometres have you travelled so far?
JARRED:	8,250 kms.
STEPHANIE:	Oooooh, thank you. (*She listened carefully to Jarred describing his trip and then asked her second question.).*
STEPHANIE:	Does Jarred need lots of tyres for his electrical wheelchair?
JARRED:	No I do not but I get lots of punctures in my tyres.
STEPHANIE:	Thank you.

Stephanie was attentive during the interview, despite the difficulties with the radio, and the interference from Vicki and Will doing their lessons. She was interested in Jarred's experiences and commented to the interviewer many times during the talk. Stephanie listened especially carefully to Mr Garvey so that she understood what was happening.

At the end of the half hour session, Mr Garvey concluded the lesson:

> Just a couple of reminders, Today, between 10.30 AM and 11.30 AM, there will be happening, live from the Leederville Interactive Television Centre, a science program. Remember, Jarred will return on Friday and there will be a chance to ask questions.

Mr Garvey told the students to "keep up the great work" and said that Mr Lee, another teacher at the school of the air, would be taking the class tomorrow as he would be off visiting one of Stephanie's class mates on his station.

Conclusion

Stephanie is a happy, confident child who is eager to please and co-operate with those around her. She is proud of and enthusiastic about her station life and looks forward to the time when she will work on the station. "When I grow up I want to be a stock girl and help with the cattle on Loretta". She has a positive attitude to school work and realises that the work has to be done. Stephanie has acquired some independent learning skills so that she can progress through the units with a minimum of fuss. English and social studies are Stephanie's favourite subjects, as she is able to use and develop her considerable skill in reading and writing. Stephanie has good rapport with her home tutor and assists in the classroom when it is appropriate. The home tutor emphasises that school of the air and distance education materials have their limitations and she has added other materials to assist her children's learning. Her straight forward comments about distance education and school of the air are based on years of experience as a governess and mother. The home tutor is keen to assist the Distance Education Centre to develop programs that are easy to use and beneficial to developing good learning styles for children in the bush.

CHAPTER 19
CASE STUDY 14: TROY PROCTOR

Judith Rivalland

Troy lives with his family on a property in the remote south of Western Australia. The family have lived in many different places, both in New Zealand and Australia, depending upon where Mr Proctor has been able to find work. Mrs Proctor was born in Perth and completed her high schooling to Year 10 in a metropolitan high school. Mr Proctor was born in New Zealand, where he completed high school to Year 10. Mr Proctor took a job with a mining company in the north of Western Australia and commuted to join his family, who were living in the large country town about 200 kms from where they now live. He was very unhappy being so far away from the family, so he accepted a position managing the farm on which they now live. Mrs Proctor described her husband as a farm worker and herself as a housewife or "Jack of all trades". She helps out on the farm, runs the family home and spends considerable time witnessing for the Congregation of Jehovah's Witness.

There are four children in the Proctor family. Clive, who is 24 years old, completed his schooling to Year 10 and then spent four and half years at the headquarters of the Jehovah's Witnesses. He is now the district co-ordinator for the Jehovah's Witnesses and spends considerable time witnessing around the district as well as helping his father when there are busy times on the farm. Errol (21) finished Year 10 at school and now lives in Perth, where he works as a landscape gardener. Troy (15) is in Year 9 and studies by distance education, and Doug (12) travels by bus to a local primary school, where he is finishing Year 7.

The family live in a large prefabricated home on the property which they manage. It is situated about 200 kms from a major rural centre, around 30 kms from the primary school and approximately 80 kms from a small township which has a general store, hotel and a few other amenities. There is no school in this small township. Mr Proctor works on the property every day and was not at home during the time I visited the family, so all of the information gathered about this family was provided by Mrs Proctor. When I arrived at the farm Mrs Proctor was busy cleaning up after the family breakfast and preparing to do the daily bread making and to make food for the twenty or so lambs who are being hand fed as a result of losing their mothers during the drought. I was told that they had received some good rains in the previous week so it looked as if things were likely to improve.

Mrs Proctor made me a cup of coffee and we sat and talked for some time. It appeared that Mrs Proctor had some misgivings about whether or not this

study was part of the state Education Department's plan to close down some small rural schools. She explained that she would refuse to allow Troy to go to school if he were not permitted to continue studying by distance education. After I assured her about the purposes of this study and explained that it was commissioned by the Commonwealth government, she continued to discuss Troy's schooling. During the discussion which followed, she explained the details of Troy's troublesome school years and how moving to the farm and beginning to study by distance education had made an enormous difference to the success Troy was achieving.

Mrs Proctor believes that regular schooling does not provide for children who do not fit into the system with ease. In her view, Troy is a clever boy who has never fitted easily into the school system and, despite his ability, she had been afraid "he would end up without an education at the end of his schooling". She explained how he had been a premature baby and suffered considerable trauma at birth. Despite his apparent natural aptitude for many things, the doctors had warned her that he was likely to have some problems and she has always felt there were aspects of learning which were particularly difficult for him. He was able to read and write when he began school but, right from the beginning, regular schooling "was a nightmare from day one".

> I couldn't understand why, I mean he went to school reading and writing at five and he could write, so you know the problems that he encountered I found very difficult to understand. That sort of thing that he does there, I mean we do quite a lot of reading books, you know like it is quite an effort and he's quite a proficient public speaker and all the rest of it.

It appeared that, although Troy could do the work quite easily, when he was at school he had difficulty in working out what needed to be done at the same speed as the other children. Mrs Proctor always believed he had a perceptual problem, but the teachers felt he had considerable talent and just needed to be pushed along. She explained this as follows:

> I mean I've got some reports in there. I'll show you the reports. The reports are interesting. A lot of Troy's problems really depended on attitudes and whether they were willing to help and assist in the various areas where there are difficulties.

She continued telling me about the frustration Troy had met at primary school and went on to describe this:

> MRS PROCTOR: Teachers, they all make that comment that he is not doing as well as he should be because they could see the potential. I had one say to me that he should be at the top of the class.
>
> INT: I suppose it's hard when you're teaching a bright child with potential not to be trying to get him up to where they perceive he could be isn't it?

MRS PROCTOR: Except they should try and listen. I kept saying to them 'Alright, the reasons will be because the doctors have assured him that he will have problems, but they all said the same sort of thing that 'oh that was a very long time ago.' You know 'why should it still affect him today?' but I mean if you've had a leg off with cancer you want to live, even though it was a very long time ago.

Eventually, Troy became so miserable at school that she asked for a full medical assessment to be done. This did indicate that Troy had some minor perceptual problems which may have made it difficult for him to understand school tasks in the context of a large group of children. However, it seemed by that time, he had become so unhappy at school, his attitude and poor self concept made it almost impossible for him to reach anywhere near his potential. He had reached a point where he needed serious counselling and medication. In her opinion, Troy was a capable student who could not be pushed and when left to work at his own rate could cope quite well. The opportunity to work by distance education offered a solution to some of the problems being faced by Troy and with time, he and his mother appear to have worked out how to manage his studies. Mrs Proctor soon learned that she could not push Troy:

> But like, with the stress side of things, he's gotten to the stage now even around home, you know like, you know in a day he's supposed to put out so much work and so if you stay on his back so to speak and keep him working he gets to the stage where he is so tensed up and he is screaming. Now I am fearful that when this child is out in the work system, a lot of work is pressurised, how is he going to cope now? He's had seven years of that sort of pressure in the school system so that for two years I've had him on a nerve tonic trying to keep him calmed down and yet he was nothing like that. He's a very laid back, easy going kid, but it surely was the school system and the pressure that came about from that.

After the first few weeks of working with Troy, she realised she would have to let him work at his own rate and allow him to move more slowly through his sets of work than the other children. So she took the following action:

> So I rang them and said 'Well he's going to end up with two options. He's going to have to finish school at the end of the year because he can't handle it any more and the kid's insane or we can slow it down or pick out four subjects that he can do and just let him carry on in those four subjects.' Well they said he's got to finish certain levels of work before he can go just picking out certain subjects and what they've suggested is that we just slow it right down, let him work at his own pace, like English has to be taken to 4. something. He might be on 3. something but just take it through to where he's done levels that he has to do and then put

him over on to subjects, like maths he's very good at. It's something he really enjoys doing. Computing he really enjoys doing. Science he's very good at and absolutely loves and likes doing and tech drawing.

Initially there had been a few problems getting Troy started on distance education because the family did not understand the system fully. At first there was a hold up in getting all of the materials, but these problems were resolved and Mrs Proctor is now very pleased with the progress being made by Troy. The following transcript provides the details of these problems and how they were taken care of:

MRS PROCTOR: Well we did run into a few hassles in the beginning of the year which was a shame really. See he got started late. He got his four core subjects through but we'd had to pay school fees and they needed quite a lot of money up front and we just honestly couldn't send it away at the time and they said that they couldn't send the subjects off until such times as the money had come through and it went on for weeks and weeks and weeks because we really just didn't have $180 or whatever it was to send away.

INT: So he couldn't get his materials.

MRS PROCTOR: No, and so he got really delayed.

INT: Right.

MRS PROCTOR: A lot of his work just got very delayed which was a shame and in the end they decided to put through a request for you know like there is a clothing allowance, school book allowance which solved the problem and I mean if we could have got into that straight away.

INT: Right. So you'll know about it in future and you should be able to resolve it quicker in future.

MRS PROCTOR: That was a bit of a problem. I've got no complaints really. I have been very happy with what he's been doing.

Aspirations

Mr and Mrs Proctor don't have any strong feelings about a career path for Troy. They would be happy to see him continue past Year 10 if that were his wish, but they do not want to put any pressure on him to do anything which is academic and will have no relevance to his interests. Mrs Proctor feels schooling is often too academically based and does not take into account practical skills, so if Troy continued on to further education she would like to see him go into the TAFE system rather than to a university. If Troy is happy and permitted to continue studying only the subjects which are relevant to his

interests, he may continue with his studies and take up drafting or technical drawing. If he were to do this, he could possibly get employment at the headquarters of the Congregation of the Jehovah's Witnesses, where members of the congregation assist with the building program. Troy also indicated that he would really like to qualify in drafting or technical drawing so that he could go and help with the building program. Mrs Proctor described her views about Troy's future as follows:

INT: Yes, and at the moment you really don't know whether he is likely to stay on distance education after Year 10?

MRS PROCTOR: Well it depends. Like if he can go on and continue on in his studies and his drafting and things like that or his tech drawing and the subjects that he enjoys, yes he can go on as long as he likes. That doesn't bother us after Year 10.

INT: Do you expect that he's likely to live in a rural area when he's, whatever happens to him? Do you think he's likely to go on living in a rural area?

MRS PROCTOR: That's extremely difficult to answer, that one because we don't even know if we will stay in a rural area. We tend to be more, we don't like living in the city. We don't like living in the city though but because of our religion oftentimes we do end up living in a city because there's not a lot of contact in areas like this so it's difficult to assess that one.

Family Literacy Practices

Religion

The family involvement in preparing for meetings with other members of the Jehovah's Witness congregation entails considerable reading and textual analysis, as well as some writing. The family try to attend five meetings a week, at least three of which are held in the small township about 80 kms from their home. When possible, they try to visit the larger community in the rural centre 200 kms from the farm. Clive, the older brother, is a co-ordinator for the area so he finds it necessary to do more reading and writing than the rest of the family. Nevertheless, the whole family read four chapters of the Bible per week and then refer to and discuss the texts of interpretation used by the congregation. Usually the family participate in these discussions in the evenings or mornings, depending on what else is happening. These practices were described to me as follows:

MRS PROCTOR: We do have a program that we do that allows reading preparation together as a family, so we

prepare our five meetings or with the *Watchtower* the kids will do on their own.

INT: So that's five meetings. How often are the five meetings?

MRS PROCTOR: Every week. So we prepare for that every week.

INT: Oh that's reading preparation for five meetings every week. And do you do that all together?

MRS PROCTOR: As a family yeah because otherwise the kids don't really understand what ...

INT: So what does that involve exactly? Does that mean, do you read aloud, do you read together, what happens?

MRS PROCTOR: Well we've got four chapters of the Bible that we do every week and we listen to that on tape and then we might look up relevant information, you know like if there's something that comes up in that that nobody understands, we'll look it up and see what it's all about.

INT: So when you look that up, are there special books you look that up in?

MRS PROCTOR: Yeah, we have an index that we go through and look at whatever it recommends.

INT: So there's actually really a lot of reading and writing?

MRS PROCTOR: Yeah, we do quite a lot yeah. And marking, underlining publications.

INT: Right.

MRS PROCTOR: You know like we'll go through those question and answers.

INT: And you discuss that, talking about it?

MRS PROCTOR: Yes, if the kids don't understand things we go through that and discuss what it means.

Notice how the reading practices described by Mrs Proctor resemble many school reading practices. The family listen to a reading from the Bible, then discuss the meanings of these readings with reference to a sanctioned interpretation of the text provided by special sets of references. These meanings are often highlighted or underlined and then discussed with the children in order to ensure that a common interpretation of the text has been made. School reading often involves a shared reading of a text, followed by discussion and questioning during which time the teacher clarifies the students' interpretation to ensure at least some congruence with her own. Sometimes the textual work done by children in establishing a shared interpretation of the text involves finding the relevant "facts" by highlighting main events or selecting key words. The school reading practices which most closely resemble the religious reading practices of the Proctor family are those

which relate to reading informational texts. In subject English, teachers often establish practices which encourage students to make personal interpretations of fictional texts and then they attempt to encourage students to explain and justify their personal interpretations of those texts.

As well as this weekly preparation for meetings, at times each member of the congregation is expected to prepare and lead the discussion at one of the meetings. When I visited, Troy was in the process of preparing to lead a meeting. This appeared to require a considerable amount of reading and writing as well as familiarisation with the text to enable the leader to talk about that particular reading with confidence and understanding. In contrast with his school behaviour, Troy seemed to cope with this demanding task with relative ease, although he does get support from his mother and older brother. As leader for the evening, Troy was expected to prepare an introduction and conclusion for the set reading. This entails preparing a talk of about five minutes duration. Firstly ,he must read the references in the support materials and select an appropriate introduction. He would then read the Bible passage aloud and conclude with an explanation of the meaning of the passage developed from one of the many supporting texts supplied by the Kingdom of Jehovah. Once he has written the text out in full, his mother or older brother usually help him to select key words to summarise the piece into a shorter text from which he is expected to speak to the group using just the key words. As Troy is being prepared for his presentations at these meetings, he is simultaneously learning about summarisation and key words:

> And what we try and do, like, he doesn't write or he might write it out initially you know, the whole lot of it but then just pick out key words and put them in so that he tries to remember and then just use it from a smaller manuscript but they cut it down so that it starts out as ... but then over a period of time he'll get it down to where he can read and have a talk with just the key words that he can remember.

This appeared to be a complex task with which Troy felt quite at ease. He felt it was not difficult because the ideas are all provided for him and he is only required to select an appropriate introduction and conclusion to match with the set reading. However his mother informed me that he will be expected to write his own introductions and conclusions as he gets older.

Reading and Writing

The family have a large collection of books, most of which are related to their religious beliefs. The children have a set of encyclopedias to help with their school work and they also have a bookcase full of children's fiction which has mainly been purchased at second-hand bookshops. They rarely visit a library so any other reading material required by Troy has to be sent from the distance education library. It appears that a great deal of the family time is taken up by the reading and discussion of religious texts and the *Watchtower* magazine. The family usually get the Saturday and Sunday papers and share

the reading of these. Troy explained that he sometimes gets around to reading a library book and had just finished reading *The Secret Enemy* by Norma Balzer. His favourite book is *Animalia* by Graeme Base.

Most of the writing done in the household is done in conjunction with the family religious practices. As a congregational co-ordinator, Clive, Troy's older brother does considerable amounts of writing, and the rest of the family do some writing when it is their turn to present one of the weekly discussions. Mrs Proctor spends quite a lot of time out witnessing so she often leaves lists of jobs or instructions for Troy or Clive if he is at home. During the day, Troy is often home by himself so he is expected to answer the telephone and take down messages for the rest of the family.

Television and Computers

Troy has a computer in his room which he uses for his computer studies work. He has no printer, so he is unable to print any of his other school work. He does not have a modem, so Troy is unable to forward his work directly to his teachers through his computer. He is, however, very interested in computers and he spends a great deal of time experimenting with all of the programs he can find on his computer. He uses the Ultra Paint 183 program to design drawings and models of different fantasy objects. He is obviously familiar with computer programs, as he spent much time demonstrating for me all of the different programs he had learned to use by himself.

Doing Distance Education

Troy does his distance education work in the bedroom he shares with his younger brother, Doug. There is a double bunk bed on one side of the room and on the other side of the room there is a bookcase which holds the family encyclopedia and the children's story books. Troy's desk is under the window next to a bookshelf on which he has all of his model planes and other toys. He has a school timetable pasted on the wardrobe on the right hand side of his desk and the computer sits next to the work space on his desk. His distance education materials are kept in the drawers below his desk and his completed work is stored in a box beneath the boys' beds.

Mrs Proctor has given up trying to push Troy to get his work done as she realised it caused too much stress and did not achieve results. Troy now organises his own work and proceeds at his own pace:

> No, that's sort of been totally left to him to do. I mean if, like, today the letter came about no computing work being finished, say, I would talk to him about that and say he will get into that over the next few days and concentrate on that area a little bit.

He does not have a set timetable, but usually begins the day with the subjects he doesn't like and moves on to the ones he most enjoys. As he begins each

new subject he sets the alarm on his watch for a period of 45 minutes and when the alarm goes off he changes to another subject. I noticed that, when the alarm went off, he was less inclined to stop work on the subjects he enjoys than the ones he dislikes. He described the way he organises his work as follows:

INT:	About how much of the time that you're doing your work would you have any supervision? Very little?
TROY:	Mm, not very little, but not very much.
INT:	So you don't really have a regular time table or do you? You just sort of work out your timetable as you go along? What do you do?
TROY:	(Inaudible) 45 minutes on each subject.
INT:	And how often do you get your school work interrupted? How often would you not do school work because something was on?
TROY:	Couple of times (inaudible) depends on what's happening.
INT:	This term about how many times would you not have done your school work as normal? So what sort of things take you away from your work?
TROY:	When I'm helping Dad, helping Mum. When I see what's happening outside with the animals (inaudible). Stuff like that.

Unlike many of the other children in this study, Troy appeared to be less concerned with getting tasks done and more interested in "doing so much time" on each subject. He seems to measure his progress by his ability to stay on task and to complete his time allocation rather than on whether or not he has completed a task successfully. He appears to have constructed a view of schooling as one of spending time on task without a great deal of concern about task completion or marks achieved. When he is really interested in something, he will investigate the task quite fully because he is not worried about necessarily completing the task quickly. However, if he is not interested in something, he can drag out the activity for a long time. Troy did not seem to find any of his work very difficult and appears to handle the literacy demands of his studies very effectively. His achievement seems to be most closely linked to his motivation and interest in a subject and his willingness to get his work completed. His unusual way of working, in some ways, constructs a learner who is not task bound and is willing to fully explore some activities if they appeal to him. The disadvantage of this approach is the problems he has in completing work on time, especially in subject areas which do not interest him.

Troy begins work at around 9.00 AM each day, he works through until 10.30 AM when he has morning tea. He then works from 11.00 AM until 12.30 PM, when he has lunch, after which he works from 1.30 PM until 3.50 PM:

> Well we tried to make sure, well we suggest he starts at the latest nine o'clock. Getting him to start getting out of bed and start doing some work early in the morning because he found that that was quite good but that seems to have slipped by the board again. But nine o'clock, I get very upset with him if he hasn't started by nine. You know, if he goes on wandering around the house, which sometimes does happen.

Troy does much of his work un-supervised, as his mother is often busy either helping out with aspects of the farm, organising the home, or witnessing for the Kingdom of Jehovah. She does help with his English when she can, because she feels this is the subject in which she has the appropriate knowledge to help:

> MRS PROCTOR: Oh well, English for instance. Oh yes, like if he'll get stuck sometimes on a story and he'll be sitting there trying to get things started. I think once he's started, once he's got the first few words down, he's away. He'll come out and he'll give us an idea of what he's trying to accomplish but doesn't know how to start it off so I might run past him about three or four beginnings. Like for instance he had a shark attack one to do and he said 'How do I start off?' So we ran a few things past him and he then, once he got a few ideas presented to him he went ahead and worked out, you know I think it was a person in a wetsuit, you know that type of thing. Just the actual wording, once he's got that going he's away then.
>
> INT: So about how often would you actually give assistance?
>
> MRS PROCTOR: Well it seems to be getting less and less but it was frequent. You know it would be, if I'm here generally, which funnily enough if I'm not here he (inaudible) but if I'm here then usually he's asking me something.

She tends to wait for Troy to ask for assistance because she doesn't like to push him too hard. If Troy has a major problem when no-one is at home, he may ring his teachers, but he does not do this very often. Troy tends to work on regardless of school holidays, completing as much work as he can cope with, as well as fitting his school work around his obligations to the Congregation of Jehovah and helping out with farm work if things are particularly busy.

Mrs Proctor has found it quite complex to balance the demands of managing Troy's distance education program as well as all of her other commitments.

She found this difficult when he first started on the distance education program, but she now finds that Troy is much more independent and demands less attention than he did at first. On the whole, she finds that she can manage the materials quite easily, although the maths program can cause her difficulty because she doesn't understand some of the tasks. She explained how she deals with supervision as follows:

MRS PROCTOR: Yes, that I found a bit difficult. Especially you know you could be, the things that I found hard because I'm often running around outside and he would come outside and say 'Mum' you know da, da, da, da, da, and I'd give him some ideas or something like that and then it would be quite a while before I could get him back in here again to settle back into his routine. I'd find him half an hour later still wandering around out there doing things along with me or something which, that was very distracting and of course once he sees me feeding chooks he's there doing something. But that I found difficult.

INT: The amount of supervision that's required?

MRS PROCTOR: Initially yes. I still do find that hard trying to balance that out so that I'm not stressing him out and encouraging him.

INT: Keeping that balance. Right. And are there any subjects or anything in particular that are better or worse in terms of the amount of supervision that's required?

MRS PROCTOR: English I have to give a lot of supervision. Um, the other subjects, most of it, I help to a degree like his cooking. I have to do a fair bit of supervision but most of the other subjects he does, he copes well with them.

Maths

On the day I visited Troy he began the morning with maths because he is "good at maths and that's why I like them". He set to work with interest, reading the text with apparent ease. He was doing an activity using the theorem of Pythagoras. He needed to work his way through the example and then complete two exercises based on the example. He quickly read through the example showing how to calculate the length of one side of a right angled triangle which was expressed as follows:

> Yesterday you calculated the length of the hypotenuse in a right angled triangle.
> What happens when we know that length and need to find the length of another side?
> Consider this triangle.

Troy read through the example and then moved straight on to the first exercise. He completed this exercise without any difficulty and marked his work. He told me that when he has difficulty with his maths he sometimes looks at the answers and works backwards from the answers to work out how to resolve the problem. He assured me that he did not cheat, he just used this strategy to help him resolve any problems. He then moved straight on to the next exercise which he also marked when it was finished. He stapled his work to the page and moved on to the next day's work about surveys.

Before beginning his next maths activity he set his watch again for another 45 minutes. At that moment his mother asked him to help her move all of the pet lambs down to the paddock near the shed as they would not go by themselves. He went off and helped his mother, when he returned he reset his watch and started to read the information about surveys. Shown below is the one page explanation about surveys which he read:

> Collecting information for a survey is not an easy task. There are plenty of pitfalls.
>
> For example, if you wish to find out whether spectators at a football match would buy health food from the take-away vans, what questions would you ask?
>
> First you would need to decide what you meant by *health food.*
> Would you include fresh fruit?
> What about manufactured health food bars coated in chocolate?
> Will cost be an important factor?
>
> Then you would need to write your questions so they were not biased. "You wouldn't pay 80 cents for this muesli bar would you?" is a loaded, biased question.
>
> You must decide who you are going to survey. If there are 950 people at a match, you cannot question everyone. You will have to choose a sample.
>
> Decide on a time and a place for the survey. A survey carried out at half-time beside the take-away van will probably produce different results from one done just before the end of the match.

Notice how this activity is done in the context of maths but could just as easily have been an English activity in which students are learning to detect the values and bias in a text. Because the activity was set as a maths exercise, Troy seemed to be quite interested in the issue. He read through the explanation about surveys and then went straight to the exercise in which he was asked to explain the bias in a number of surveys which were described in the text book. Troy had no problems in detecting the bias in the examples given but did have some problems in writing his explanations so that they could be understood

by someone else. It was difficult to know whether or not this was a genuine problem of expression or a lack of willingness on Troy's part to check whether his explanations could be understood by someone else. Notice in the sentences written by Troy shown below, how insufficient contextual information is provided for Troy's readers and there is a tendency to use exophoric reference ties linked to the contextual information not given in the text:

1. Some people don't have a phone. So not every home in Australia has yellow pages.

2. only serveyed students coming early not people coming late

3. the suburb was proberly Subiaco so supporting there own team.

4. Woolen jumpers are only worn in winter

Young writers who display these characteristics have often not realised that additional information needs to be given to the readers of written texts to compensate for the lack of a shared context which is usually available in spoken conversations. In his written responses Troy did not really give an explanation of the bias he recognised in the surveys, instead he made a series of statements. This may also indicate that he has not yet learned how to argue a position when writing an explanation or exposition. However, in this case, Troy may have been unwilling to check his work or felt it was unimportant to write effectively because he was doing a maths exercise. It is interesting to note the spelling mistakes "serveyed", "proberly" and "woolen" made in these four sentences. Troy may have been able to correct these errors if he felt they were important. As I watched Troy finish this activity, it seemed evident that he understood the task quite easily but had some difficulty in capturing his responses in suitable sentences which demonstrated this knowledge for his teachers. It was also clear that Troy found it difficult to discipline himself to take care of the fine details of his writing, although he displayed a great deal of patience in dealing with the small details of his computer drawing. Interest in what he was learning appeared to be critical in gaining Troy's successful participation in all tasks. He has developed the skills to be a learner in contexts which interest him, but has not yet learned how to be a "school learner" which requires participating in tasks which do not always appear to be immediately relevant to everyday life. This view of learning is congruent with his mother's construction of "school being too academically based and does not give sufficient account of practical skills". It also matches with the lifestyle of the family who have moved around the countryside earning their living from numerous different jobs, demonstrating a versatility in their practical work skills.

English

Troy has firmly established the view that English is difficult and not pleasurable. He explained that he finds reading easy but writing quite difficult. The difficulty he has with writing seems to overshadow his fast and effective

reading behaviour which allows him to understand what he reads with relative ease. He finds it difficult to think of ideas for his writing and to deal with the mechanics of spelling and punctuation. The amount of effort required to write well makes Troy dislike English despite the reasonably good marks he gains for his written essays when he makes an effort. He told me he had been given 25/30 for his last essay and had previously gained 22/30 and 27/30 for other assignments. He explained his difficulties with writing in the following transcript:

TROY:	Punctuation is kind of a bit hard but not hard as what's grammar?
INT:	Well knowing how to put the order of the words using the words in the right tense and things like that?
TROY:	Mm, kind of hard with that (inaudible).
INT:	But when you have to write something like that, how do you go about it?
TROY:	(Inaudible) the stories. Writing down and asking Mum and Dad what I could write, what I could put in the stories.
INT:	Do you put down points first or what do you do?
TROY:	Well this last story I did, I put down points. The other story I didn't quite put the points down.
INT:	So is it difficult to get started is it? I mean once you get started is it all right to write the story or is it hard all the way through?
TROY:	I get half way and it's kind of hard and kind of easy. Some bits are hard and other bits are easy. Sometimes I've put something beforehand and go through and put it in a sentence and kind of like put it in to repeat it and it doesn't sound right and then you have to go through like what the (inaudible) list.
INT:	So if you wanted to describe what you have to do to be a good writer what do you think you have to do to be a good writer? What are the things that you have to know about and be able to do to be a good writer?
TROY:	Um, have good ideas all lined up. Like it sounds in some stories the information or story line and it sounds like they have the whole story and then they've got the points and things in order. I find it hard for me to get the whole story tied in and some story writers get the whole story tied in.
INT:	What else do you need to do to be a good writer do you think?

TROY: Good at literature, can write and have good knowledge of words.

Notice how Troy has a good metacognitive understanding of what good writers do. Nevertheless, it seems the effort required to write effectively makes him dislike writing. Since Troy has difficulty completing any tasks which he dislikes, his disinterest in writing makes it extremely arduous. His dislike of writing creates a strange ambiguity when juxtaposed against the interest he takes in reading and writing as preparation for his meetings of the Kingdom of Jehovah. The textual practices he is required to use for these presentations are very like the textual practices of school English and social studies lessons, however, he perceives these religious practices as highly relevant to his life and therefore not difficult. There is one major difference between Troy's religious reading and writing practices and the writing practices of school. The religious writing he does is based on the religious texts made available to the members of the congregation so, generally, Troy does not have to provide his own ideas in order to prepare his presentations but, rather, he is required to select passages from the religious references and then summarise these and integrate them into a coherent piece of text. The contrast with writing for English is that he is often expected to think of his own topics and ideas.

The relevance or difficulty of a task seems to be the major factor in determining Troy's learning practices, yet, once he got started on his 45 minute timed English lesson, he enjoyed the activity he had to do on the day I visited. He concentrated hard and began reading through his English text without referring to the task which followed it. The lesson was an introduction to expository writing in which the students were given an explanation of the meaning of expository writing and then introduced to a piece of Clive James' writing as an example of expository writing which is subjective. The students were asked to note how "his descriptions of people, places and objects are nearly always memorable, as are his explanations of *how, why, when* and *where* particular experiences occurred". The students were then asked to read an extract from *Flying Visits*. Troy read through the extract with ease showing considerable interest in what he read. When he completed reading the extract he was asked to complete the following task:

TASK A

I mentioned earlier that Clive James is keen to give his readers clear mental pictures of the experiences he is sharing with them. Which **single sentence** in the extract gave you the clearest mental picture? Write the sentence, then explain why you found the mental image it created to be particularly clear

Troy very quickly wrote down the sentence "look at those circular salt lakes, each a separate colour like the little tubs of paint in a child's paint-box". At that moment the alarm went off to signal the end of the period, so he closed his book and said, "that's the end of English". Although I suggested that he finish the explanation he failed to do so. Despite the ease with which Troy read

and understood the text he once again had difficulty in explaining his answer. His inability to go beyond the simple statement of correct answers to explaining the logic behind such answers seems to be an ongoing problem for Troy. Whether or not this difficulty is an outcome of a lack of knowledge of the skills involved, an unwillingness to engage in demanding tasks, or the embodiment of strongly embedded textual practices involving statement of facts rather than reasoning about given information, is difficult to ascertain. It does, however, appear to be a practice which pervades the work done by Troy in all subject areas. It is a particular problem in subject English, where the set materials construct a view of English based on personal interpretations, which the students are then expected to demonstrate in their own writing.

Social Studies

When Troy began his social studies lesson after lunch, I asked him to tell me about the work he had been doing prior to this particular activity. He found it troublesome to explain what he had done previously. I had noticed that he had some difficulty in providing me with an overview of some of his other subjects. He has adopted a practice of focussing on a particular activity for a set period of time without necessarily connecting what he is doing to any of his previous work. This reflected the problems he had in logical explanation, as well as his interest in getting through the next 45 minutes rather than task completion. His lack of interest in the general organisation of his schooling mitigates against him forming a clear overview of what he is learning in each of the subject areas. This contrasts with most of the other children in the study, who all tend to focus on task completion and seem to have a clear picture of how their activities fit together. On the one hand, Troy is very concerned about the relevance of the different subjects to his general interests but, on the other hand he does not appear to be interested in the relationships between different aspects of the subjects he is learning.

When I asked Troy how he liked doing social studies he replied, "It's alright sometimes depending on what it is". He went on to explain that his last unit on "Asians are alright, you know talking about their religions and country and things like that". After some further discussion I ascertained that he enjoyed the social studies units which were factual and informed the students about different countries and places, however, he did not like the units which required analysis and interpretation of different issues. He was currently completing a unit on Australian government which he was not enjoying. The particular part of the unit he was doing focussed on taxation and why Australians pay tax. He completed the factual questions shown below without too much difficulty:

1. (a) From what source does the Government obtain most of its revenue?
   (b) What is a tax?
   (c) What is a progressive tax?

2. Which level of Government raises the most revenue?

3. What is a grant ?

However, when he was asked to classify different sources of income he lost interest and then virtually stopped work when he was asked to finish a question which required explanation: "Briefly explain three reasons why Australians pay tax". At this point he engaged me in conversation about the computer program he was working on and so filled in the 45 minute lesson time he allowed himself. Once again, his practice of stating facts rather than explaining them seems to have constructed a difficulty level for this task which discouraged him from completing the assessment.

Computer Education

Troy is very interested in the computer. He not only finished his computer studies very quickly but he also moved on to show me some of the drawings and models he has developed on the computer. With ease, he worked through two activities about the working memory. In these activities he needed to carry out certain calculations and then store them in the computer's memory. After the first activity he completed another one in which speed was important, so he finished the task and then recorded the time he took. He went on to show me some of the problems he had designed to test his computer skills. In the following excerpt Troy told me how he had calculated how many litres of rain had fallen on the roof of their house:

INT:	Oh right. How many litres have you had (inaudible)
TROY:	I've had over about 4,000 litres. (Inaudible) that number there ...
INT :	4,000 litres. How do you measure that?
TROY:	(Inaudible). The area of the (inaudible) so I found out how many times (inaudible)
INT:	How did you work out what the area of the roof was?
TROY:	Well I measured this long tape (inaudible) two tapes ... half way and then you go round and round the verandah and just measured that and then ... there's 17 so I timesed it by two (inaudible) and that was the number and then I divided it by the area of the (inaudible)
INT:	Ah that's very good. So how much rain do you have in mils?
TROY:	Um, you divide that by 1,000.
INT:	39. 3.9?
TROY:	(Inaudible) It's 3,950. That one, yeah. (Inaudible)
INT:	Mm, that's good. You'll be able to sell the information to the weather bureau.

TROY: Probably (Inaudible).

In his computer work, Troy shows the capacity to solve problems and work at a speed not shown in any of his of his other subjects except maths. It is difficult to know whether or not he could provide a logical explanation for his actions in these two subjects if it were required of him. It seems likely that in maths and computer education he uses the same learning practice as he uses in other subjects, that of "finding the facts". However, in maths and computer education, "finding the facts" is sufficient to resolve the problems inherent in the tasks.

Conclusion

Troy has constructed a set of reading and writing practices around the religious activities of the family. Through these practices, he engages regularly in reading, writing and interpreting a set of religious texts in such a way as to find the inherent truths in those texts. He engages in a practice of seeking out "the facts" of what is read. In this context, he is highly motivated to complete this textual work because his interest in the Books of Jehovah makes these practices relevant and engaging. He has constructed himself as a reader and writer in a religious context but not necessarily a school reader and writer. Troy readily participates in the school subjects which he perceives to be relevant and easy but he engages reluctantly with the subjects he perceives to be difficult. In order to cope with the subjects he dislikes, he has adopted a practice of working on each subject for 45 minutes. Thus he adopts a time oriented approach rather than a task oriented practice. This strategy enables him to slowly and systematically work through the subjects he dislikes without the tasks becoming too arduous. On the other hand, this practice does not necessarily allow him to integrate new information into a global view of those subjects. At times he finds his school topics interesting and he will become engaged in reading about those topics, but his practice of reading and writing "about the facts" appears to make it difficult for him to complete written tasks which require logical explanation.
new information into a global view of those subjects. At times he finds his school topics interesting and he will become engaged in reading about those topics, but his practice of reading and writing "about the facts" appears to make it difficult for him to complete written tasks which require logical explanation.

CHAPTER 20
CASE STUDY 15: MIRANDA ROURKE

William Louden

Langdon Station is the home of the Rourke family. The property, about 200,000 hectares in area, is several hundred kilometres from the coast. The old stone homestead, built almost 100 years ago, is surrounded by a series of outbuildings which remain from the time when many more people were employed on the station. In front of the house a wide lawn runs down to an old tennis court and a permanent waterhole. When Mr and Mrs Rourke took up the lease eleven years ago, their two daughters were babies. Miranda, who is now in Year 7, was eighteen months old and Holly (Year 6) was six months old. Things were difficult when they began. "I don't know how I did it," said Mrs Rourke, looking back. "No 240 volt, only kero fridges. But things are a lot easier now with telephones and TV".

Mr and Mrs Rourke were both brought up in coastal towns in the region. They both speak English as their mother tongue. Mrs Rourke left a local high school at the end of Year 10. Mr Rourke was educated at another local school before completing Years 11 and 12 at private schools in Perth. Mrs Rourke hopes that her daughters will go on to Year 11 and 12, but does not regard this as essential:

> I'd like them to go to Year 11 and 12, but to me it wouldn't be so huge if they got a job after Year 10. It wouldn't worry me, because I think a job is important. As to what they do, I don't really know. Anything they want to do, you know, it's fine with me. As long as they are happy doing it.

Because of their isolation, members of the family spend a great deal of time together. Family activities most often revolve around school or work on the station. At mustering time, for example, they all work together:

> We all go out mustering. Jock will be flying the plane, and I'll be on the bike, one of the girls will be on the bike and one of them in the car ... and then we'll draft them up. That is the sort of thing we always do as a family.

Mrs Rourke keeps in close contact with the school of the air through the parents and citizens' association, the annual March seminar for parents and the annual camp for children at Point Peron. She telephones the school "quite a bit," especially if she is having problems with the computer or with the materials provided by the school. Sometimes the family will telephone the

school "if we're not sure of what we are doing". In such cases, she would usually ask Miranda to make the telephone call. As Mrs Rourke said:

> If she's having the problem, I'll get her to ring the teacher and then she can get the feedback. I usually ring for just like ordering paper or asking if sets are ready and things like that.

This will be Mrs Rourke's last year as a distance education home tutor. Next year, with Miranda in Year 8 and Holly in Year 7, the girls will move in to a coastal town and board with Mr Rourke's mother while they attend the local district high school. Mrs Rourke has never seriously considered allowing the girls to finish secondary school by distance education. She wouldn't want them to miss out on netball or dancing, for example. Although she would like to keep them at home for company, she thinks that would be a selfish decision:

> I'd love to have the girls around. I don't want them to go. It's the last thing I want, but for their sake and happiness I couldn't hold them home. No. All the other kids going away and they're stuck at home. No! No! I couldn't cope.

Family Literacy Practices

Reading and Writing

Although Langdon Station is isolated, the Rourke family has relatively good access to library books and other reading materials. Once a fortnight, the mail man brings them a box of books from the library in a coastal town 300 kilometres away. When Mrs Rourke first joined the library, one of the librarians asked her what sort of books she liked. The librarian now sends them books she thinks the family will enjoy:

> So we go through (the box), we don't always read whatever they've send out. We don't actually write and tell them what we want, they just know the ages of the girls. They send out what they think the girls would like. If they need anything for school we can always ask them, you know, for a bird book or something like that. They'll send that out.

In addition to the library books, the Rourke family also receives a supply of magazines and newspapers once a week when the order of stores arrives from the coast. "They send out what they don't sell," Mrs Rourke said, "and we get them without the cover". These slightly out of date publications, such as *Woman's Day, Who Weekly, New Idea* and *The Countryman,* form a staple of their reading:

> Sometimes they are a bit older, but it doesn't really matter. It's just good to read. Don't have to get into it, you know. You can put it down anytime you like. That's what I hate about books, you pick them up and you get a good one you can't get out of it, and you don't do anything for the rest of the day.

Novel reading tends to be a seasonal activity at Langdon. In the summer time they all tend to read "a fair bit". In the afternoons, especially, they "relax with a book" while it is too hot to do anything else. Miranda (Year 7) is a much more enthusiastic reader than Holly (Year 6). Mr and Mrs Rourke particularly like action books, such as those written by Wilbur Smith.

According to Mrs Rourke, Miranda "loves reading" and will "read all day if you'll let her". Miranda agreed that she reads "a lot", so much so that her sister calls her a "bookworm" and complains that she reads too much. Miranda's favourite books include "spooky stories and romantic novels". The last book she had read was *Dance of Love*, a romantic novel in the Sweet Dreams series. Holly, on the other hand, is happier with "comics, things that are easy to pick up".

Other than writing associated with the children's school work, members of the Rourke family do not have many reasons to write. Some writing is associated with the station journal kept by Mr Rourke. If, for example, he were to visit a windmill and fix a length of pipe, he would write something like "1 length of pipe, new", Mrs Rourke explained. Her own most frequent writing task is to make up the weekly supplies list which is faxed to the store on the coast. The girls occasionally write to a pen pal, perhaps once every six months. Mrs Rourke used to write to her sister, but said that it is "easier to ring her now".

There are a few regular family interactions around reading and viewing on Langdon Station. In the week before the case study data were collected, Mrs Rourke remembered asking one of the girls to consult a dictionary. Members of the family had also looked at an atlas together, as part of a discussion about attending a wedding in the United States next year. Mrs Rourke said she did not remember any recent occasions when they had read aloud together, and did not think it likely that the girls would talk to her about the books they had been reading. Nor did she remember occasions when she had discussed her reading with the girls. Conversations about television programs were more likely, she thought. In the week or two before the data were collected, for example, she remembered one of the girls talking to her about "those people that are dying in Rwanda", a reference to a current television news story about a central African civil war.

Langdon Station has satellite access to two stations, the ABC and the rural commercial network, GWN. In addition, they have a video cassette recorder. Family members' tastes in television vary widely. Mrs Rourke said she rarely watches videos and tends not to watch television in the evenings. Her favourite program is the AFL football, but the girls are not interested enough to watch a whole football game. The girls' favourite programs include *Home and Away, Country Practice, Beverley Hills 90210* and *Home and Away*. Mr Rourke prefers to watch the news and sport on television. Consequently, except for the occasional "good movie" or the ABC medical soap *GP*, the family rarely sits together to watch television in the evenings.

Doing Distance Education

As is the case on many properties, the daily routine of school work at Langdon Station is strongly influenced by the pattern of use of the generator. The lighting plant runs from 8.00 AM until 10.30 AM, so school usually starts at 8.00 AM. Mrs Rourke and the girls stop for smoko at 9.30 AM and they usually finish about 12.30 PM. If Miranda has more work to do after lunch, they may go back into the school room for another hour or so. An exception is Wednesday afternoons, when the school of the air runs art lessons over the radio.

Apart from the scheduled air lessons, the girls do not work to a strict time table. One of the factors which influences the time table is access to the computer they share. Since both Miranda and Holly use the computer for language, one of them does mathematics while the other does language. Mrs Rourke has some preferences about the time table, but she lets the girls make their own decisions about what to start on each day:

> They usually decide themselves. I don't say to them, 'Oh, come on, sit down you can do maths'. I'd say to them, 'Well what do you want to do now, it's up to you.' I like to get Miranda to do maths first, because she is fresh and, you know, it's her worst subject, so she sort of... I try to get her to do that first, and then, but usually they make up their own mind. (They say) 'Oh, no I want to do language first', or whatever.

The Rourke girls do their school work in an old stone school room which is joined to the rest of the homestead by a breeze-way. The large set of windows which form the Eastern wall of the room fill it with light. There is a satellite dish outside the window. At one end of the room is a large blackboard. At the other end of the room a long table which holds the School of the air radio, a Macintosh laptop computer, and a printer. On the fourth wall, a set of pin-up boards contains posters of Australian parrots, common insects of Australia and school time tables. A book case contains about 100 books, including eight volumes of *A Child's First Library of Learning* and the 1991 *World Almanac.* There is also a display of many school of the air awards. Each award is a coloured 10 by 15 cm card. One reads "Gold Cup" for "a fantastic holiday brochure". Another says "for an excellent recount presentation". Other awards include a "Great Essay Award" and certificate recording that Miranda submitted an entry in the state's young writers' competition. A press clipping has the headline "Station girl wins picture praise" and describes Miranda's success in a mining and industry competition in 1992.

Supervision

Mrs Rourke does not like to play too direct a teaching role in the children's language lessons. When the girls have to write a story, she prefers that they "do it for themselves first". If they find it difficult to begin or end a story, she offers them encouragement. As she said:

> Sometimes they find it hard to either finish a story or even start a story, and you can sort of say to them, 'Well what could the story be about, maybe a elephant or something', just to encourage, like that, and to keep the story going. Or (you could ask) what happened and things like that to do with story writing. And also when you're conferencing you could say 'Well, re-read it', and if they can't find anything maybe you could pick it up for them and say, you know, 'Put something different'.

When a story is finished, she asks the girls to check their spelling words. Spelling is relatively easy to supervise, she explained. She has a dictionary, so she can check whether a word is right or wrongly spelt. If there are no mistakes, she asks whether the child is "happy with it". If the child is satisfied, she tends not to comment on the story. After all, she said, "If they think it's good, well it's their story" and whatever a child writes "not everyone's going to be happy with it". One of the problems Mrs Rourke has with supervising story writing is that she is not always sure what the teachers have in mind:

> With story writing it's hard because I don't really know what they're sort of expecting, because some of my punctuation, that's not great either. So I usually leave stories a fair bit to them and once they've done it I'll send it in and then maybe (the teacher) can say, 'Well maybe this could of been done' or whatever, rather than me saying it because it might be wrong. So I usually let the teachers do the conferencing.

These general comments about her conferencing with Miranda may be illustrated by the following extracts from the transcript of a lesson in which Miranda was preparing a book review. Mrs Rourke began by reading through the instructions in the language guidelines. The instructions for the day were: "Re-read your draft from day 6 and edit for meaning, interest and cohesion (does it say what you want it to)". She then asked Miranda to read her book review aloud. Beginning with the name of the book, its author and the illustrators, Miranda read uninterrupted for about three minutes. When she finished Mrs Rourke began a brief writing conference:

MRS ROURKE:	Is what you wanted?
MIRANDA:	Yeah I changed a couple of things uh, (inaudible).
MRS ROURKE:	So it (inaudible) is that what it says?
MIRANDA:	Right.
MRS ROURKE:	What is a seance anyway?
MIRANDA:	Um, it's, you know how you um call the dead?
MRS ROURKE:	Good book Miranda!
MIRANDA:	Mum! (*Laughter.*) Um no, someone was murdered in the house right, and Kirstin, Tricia and Genevieve were trying to call the dead up,
MRS ROURKE:	Not a good thing to do.
MIRANDA:	Isn't it? Why not?

MRS ROURKE: Oh, I think it's pretty dangerous.
MIRANDA: I don't think it is.
MRS ROURKE: No it's not if ...
MIRANDA: ... Have you already done it? Have you done it?
MRS ROURKE: Yep. Okay what else? So does it mean what you, what you want it to say?
MIRANDA: Yep, I'll just change (inaudible).

In this conferencing session, Mrs Rourke allows Miranda to read the piece uninterrupted. At the conclusion, she gives Miranda an opportunity to reconsider the text. She paraphrases the conferencing instructions for the lesson, choosing to reiterate the non-technical version of the instruction supplied. She asks, "Is that what you wanted?" rather than referring to the educational jargon which reads "edit for meaning, interest and cohesion". Mrs Rourke then directly engages Miranda in a discussion about the implications of the seance in the book she has read ("not a good thing to do".) After a brief discussion about the wisdom of seances, she returns to her conferencing question ("Does it mean ... what you want it to say?").

Mrs Rourke generally finds supervision of mathematics simpler than supervision of language lessons. With mathematics, she has a home tutors' handbook "to say whether it's right or wrong" and a very clear set of instructions to follow. With language, the materials do not provide lesson-by-lesson guidance to home tutors. Because the books just provide "an overall picture" she tends not to mark the girls' language activities. As she said:

> I don't mark the language because sometimes I don't know whether it's right or wrong. So I tend to leave that. That's one for the teachers.

Unlike the children's early years of school, Mrs Rourke no longer needs to spend every moment of the school day supervising in the school room. When the children are younger, she said, "You can't just sneak out for five minutes to put the washing on". Now that the girls are in years 6 and 7, she has more freedom to organise her time around their needs. Because she no longer has to read all of the instructions to the girls, she can say, "I'm off for five minutes, you'll be alright?" There are some disadvantages in supervising older children, however. As Mrs Rourke put it, "the questions are a lot trickier".

Finding time to ensure adequate supervision had recently been a problem for Mrs Rourke. There are many other demands on her time, especially during shearing and mustering. This year, for the first time, Mr and Mrs Rourke had hired a governess during the peak workload periods. Instead of paying someone else to "be on the bike" during mustering, they had paid someone to teach the girls while Mrs Rourke helped with the mustering. This had been much better, she thought:

> (The governess) was great. She just spent all morning in there without moving, you know. She'd just spend the whole time in the school room and the kids just did so much more work. I mean, I get the work done, the maths and language done, but I don't get the pictures and presentation stuff done because (I) just haven't got time.

The pressure of time leads her to concentrate on the subjects she regards as most important. Last year, for example, she had not done any art. Having a governess for some of the year had allowed the children to do more art, which they had "really enjoyed". Another bonus from having the governess, Mrs Rourke said, was that the girls had someone who had "a bit more patience". While she had a governess, Mrs Rourke felt more like "a normal mum, sending the kids off to school":

> When I had the governesses I enjoyed that time because I knew the girls were in there having someone in there teaching them. I knew I could just do whatever I felt like and it was relaxing time because they'd come out to me with a problem that maybe Sarah said, "go and see Mum about this". And it would be easier, I'd fix it, they'd go back and it was all very relaxing. It was fun.

Despite the thousands of hours she has spent teaching the girls, she sometimes finds her work in the school room stressful. It was hard, she said, knowing that "you have to go in there and spend four hours every morning", especially if there was other work to be done. Some days, she said, "I come out of there with this huge headache and I think 'What am I doing in there?' According to Mrs Rourke, being a teacher was "hard" and she did not think she was "very good at it":

> It's really hard. Because you are not taught to teach, it's hard, you know. I hope the girls have done alright. That's all you can do.

Feedback

Like many parents, Mrs Rourke is concerned about how well her children are doing in the distance education program. The teachers are encouraging and say, "Yeah, they are doing well", she said, "but the test is when they actually go away to school". She agreed with the sentiments of a neighbour (also involved in this study) who had said what a relief it was when her children were successful in regular classes at boarding school. "Even to be just an average kid at school would be nice," she said, "after all those years you spend in school". At present, she thinks that Miranda is "a bit below average in maths" but in language she is "quite good". It is hard for the teachers to get a true measure of the children's performance, Mrs Rourke said, because it is "only when they come out to visit that they actually get to work with the child". In contrast, the regular work which they send in to be marked is not a true indication because "when you send in work, you've already looked at it":

> With the work sent in they're not getting their true reading of how the kid's going because you've already been through it with (the children). Sometimes it's been changed and all they're getting is an end result, and not actually seeing the kids working.

One recent improvement in the feedback available to Miranda and Holly is the use of a modem to link the Station with the school of the air. By sending the language work in by modem, feedback delay is much reduced and the feedback "seems to mean a lot more":

> I can send that in by the end of the week, Friday, and have it back the next week, Wednesday, or something like that. It's good, because usually by the time you send the set away (some written work) can be a week old, and then they mark it and send it back. It can be three week's old before the kids see it, and by then the kids have lost all interest in it, they don't really want to know about it. 'That was three weeks ago, what do we want to know that for?'

Mrs Rourke is very appreciative of the way the girls' current teachers provide encouraging feedback to Miranda and Holly:

> With the teachers that I've got (it's) encouragement all the time. Every now and again it'll be just sort of like, 'Oh this is great but you know maybe next time you could do this', which is terrific. I've had teachers that haven't been and it's just been real negative and the kids just don't want to look at it and think, 'Yuck, you know, I thought it was good'. I think this year it's been good.

Miranda's Views on Distance Education

After seven years of using distance education materials, Miranda has some clear preferences about the layout of materials. She likes materials that are "set out properly". She doesn't like materials where a day's activities are "just one page" or where the time was not clearly structured. Miranda likes working on her own, provided that she knows what to do. The first thing she does when she strikes a problem, she said, is to re-read the text:

> I go through it and re-read it, see if, re-read it and see if I've missed anything. If not, I'd try and work it out in my own way, not the school's way, and if that doesn't work I'd sort of call Mum and everything, then she'd say 'Well what have you done?' Like if I haven't done enough I have to, she has to leave me to it (laughs).

Sometimes, for example when Mrs Rourke is busy working with Holly, Miranda will "go on with other things that are easy" while she waits for her mother. Miranda often finds herself asking for help in mathematics:

> I have a problem, like in maths or something, with fractions and I'm not quite sure about it I ask Mum if I can have some help and she sort of says 'Well, what do you think you're doing wrong?'

> Like 'Do you think this is, like, this is how it's done?' and all that, and she sort of explains a quicker way to do it so that I know next time that like it's, you can do it.

Sometimes the mathematics materials "don't explain it properly," she said, "and Mum doesn't know either, so we have to call Dad. He's sort of the mathematician". If her father was not available, another common strategy was to ring a neighbour who had taught year 7 three times and "usually knows" the answer. Although Miranda knew that she could telephone the school of the air when she had problems, she did not do so very often. Usually they would "just try and work it out themselves". More likely she would call the school about procedural matters:

> We don't ring them up for problems. Just if I'm not quite sure about of what time language is ... just sort of what times and like just sort of to be clear in myself of it, so as to be sure about doing it.

When asked what she would have to be able to do to be "a good reader or a good writer", Miranda focused on the quality of "imagination". She was not sure if she was herself a good writer or nor, but cited the example of a friend of hers who was "a really good writer" because she "uses her imagination" and "has really good words to describe things". Miranda seemed to have an understanding of the different kinds of reading and writing strategies demanded by different texts, as this section of transcript demonstrates:

INT:	Is there any difference between the way you have to read things if you're reading something in a novel in English or you're reading something in a science or social studies book?
MIRANDA:	Sometimes we have to read it a different way because we have to understand it a different way. Like we have to put a point of perspective (*says this word slowly and carefully*) or sometimes we have to like look at it our way.
INT:	Do you have any special ways of trying to understand something from a science book?
MIRANDA:	No not really, it's just sort of, if it's more like we have to get ready for it and it's like, they're just notes. They're put in note form and everything, being science and everything, so we put our writing in that form as well.

Spelling

After she has completed her written language activities, Miranda completes the spelling activities set down by the school. Based on daily use of a spelling journal, the routine supports learning of words misspelt in written work. The section below describes part of one day's spelling activities.

When Miranda had finished typing her book review on the computer, she turned to Mrs Rourke and said, "Spelling, Mum". Mrs Rourke read through Miranda's book review and added some new spelling words to the Words to Learn sheets which come from Miranda's spelling journal. While Miranda wrote the correct spelling of permanent in the "key features" column of the spelling journal, Mrs Rourke leaned over Miranda, helping her to break the words into syllables. In the section of the transcript which is included as an example, Mrs Rourke has pointed to one of the words Miranda has previously handwritten onto her list:

MRS ROURKE: What's that one?
MIRANDA: Condensending.
MRS ROURKE: What is it?
MIRANDA: I did that one! Condensending, is it?
MRS ROURKE: Condescending.
MIRANDA: Condescending, okay.
MRS ROURKE: You've already done that one, I don't think you have.
MIRANDA: With Rachel (last term's governess).
MRS ROURKE: Oh did you?
MIRANDA: Yeah.
MRS ROURKE: Okay spell it for me then.
MIRANDA: (*Laughs*) oh not (inaudible).
MRS ROURKE: Yes?
MIRANDA: What?
MRS ROURKE: Sound it out.
MIRANDA: C-o-n-d-e-s-c-e-n-d-i-n-g.
MRS ROURKE: Yes.
MIRANDA: Is that right?
MRS ROURKE: Mm.
MIRANDA: Can I rub it out?
MRS ROURKE: Yeah. Okay.

Mrs Rourke then gave Miranda a spelling test using the personal word list. Miranda typed her answers on the computer and then gave the spelling back to Mrs Rourke. Mrs Rourke looked over Miranda's shoulder at the screen and said, "Do your syllables" and "Nearly right".

MRS ROURKE: ... do these ones first, destruction (pause, 20 seconds).
MIRANDA: D-e-s-t-r-u-c-t-i-o-n.
MRS ROURKE: Yep, written.
MIRANDA: W-r-i-t-t-e-n.
MRS ROURKE: Yes, secretary, it's in your book.

MIRANDA: Oh, s-e-c-r-a-t-a-r-y.
MRS ROURKE: That's not right.
MIRANDA: Hang on (pause 10 seconds) is it e-t-a-r-y?
MRS ROURKE: Start again.
MIRANDA: S-e-c-r-e-t-a-r-y.
MRS ROURKE: Right, permanently.
MIRANDA: Per-man-en (pause 25 seconds)
MRS ROURKE: (inaudible)
MIRANDA: Yeah, per-man, on, per-man, per-man,
MRS ROURKE: Nearly.
MIRANDA: P-e-r-m-a-n-e-n-t-l-y.
MRS ROURKE: Yeah, library. Write it down, library.
MIRANDA: What about the other one?
MRS ROURKE: It's got a trick in it, um, hey?
MIRANDA: (inaudible)
MRS ROURKE: You've got to put the 'r' in it.
MIRANDA: Library.

Miranda's Air Lesson

Air lessons are a highlight of Miranda's school day. One of the things she likes about air lessons is that they increase the range of opinions she hears on topics related to school work. "I can get Mum's opinion," she said, but with air lessons, "I can get other people's opinions":

> I look forward to them because I can talk to people and get other people's opinions ... kids and everything. It's sort of nice because I like hearing what other people say.

One of the air lessons broadcast during the data collection on Langdon Station was on the topic of puberty, a topic studied in the Year 7 health syllabus. The lesson began, as air lessons always do, with a welcome from the teacher and a call around to see who was "on the air" that morning.

TEACHER: Good morning Year 7, it's Mrs Connelly here for Health this morning and I'd like to wish you all a good morning ... I'll just call you and see who's here on air this morning. Good morning to you Sophie, how are you this morning, over?
SOPHIE: Good morning Mrs Connelly and everyone else, I'm very well thank you and how are you, over?
TEACHER: I'm fine this morning thank you Sophie, I'm very well and it's good to hear from you. Good morning to you Miranda and how are you this morning, over?

MIRANDA: Good morning Mrs Connelly and everybody else and I've, um I'm fine thank you. I've got some news for you today, over.

TEACHER: Thank you very much Miranda, that's terrific, I'm glad to hear it and it's good to hear from you.

After she welcomed students, the teacher passed on a series of messages to the class. The messages concerned instructions on preparing the clay for the afternoon's art lesson, about the mental mathematics lesson for years 6 and 7 on Friday, about the materials students would need for tomorrow's language lesson on air, and about the Parents and Citizens Association meeting later in the week. Next, the teacher checked whether the children all had their health books open at the right page. While one of the students went off to find the book, she asked the children whether they had watched the video in the health pack provided to them by the school:

TEACHER: What I'd like to know is if you've already watched the video for your Health pack, Sophie, over?

SOPHIE: Yes I have, over.

TEACHER: Good girl, Sophie. Miranda, over?

MIRANDA: No sorry I haven't, over.

TEACHER: Okay you won't need it necessarily for today but you must have it ready, you will need to have watched it for next week's lesson Miranda, so if you could jot that down in your follow up work on your diary, if you could write down 'Watch the health video for next Monday' please, okay?

Mrs Rourke, who was sitting with Miranda listening to the air lesson turned to her and said, "You were supposed to do that, were you?" When Miranda said that the teacher hadn't told her to, Mrs Rourke reminded Miranda that she was supposed to look at preparation notes in the set before each lesson. Having reminded children about the video, the teacher went on to introduce the lesson:

TEACHER: We should all have our workbook called *Puberty* in front of us and it says that a lot of children of your age and younger and older feel very um nervous and anxious about discussing it ... I think these are the things that we need to have a look at to start off with, to set our minds clear and let us know exactly what we're looking at, okay? So if everyone's got their book, I'll just flick through to make sure everybody's ready. Sophie are you OK on page 2, over?

SOPHIE: Yes, thank you, over.

TEACHER: And you Miranda on page 2 over?

MIRANDA: Yes thank you over.

TEACHER: (*After working down the class roll*) Well done! What a fantastic class! We're all set. Okay, to start off with I'm just going to read (some of the points from the book). The first one is that maturity develops certain psychological and emotional changes, so at your age now, either now or a bit later on or you may already have started, you're going to be changing, not just physically but emotionally and psychologically, so it means changes in the way you feel and the way you think and how you look at things.

One of the consequences of these changes, she said, was that students would sometimes be confused and might need someone to talk to:

TEACHER: You need to be able to say if you're feeling crook or if you're feeling unhappy and why you're feeling that way, or if you're feeling good, and you need to also respond to how they feel as well. So that's a fairly demanding sort of thing and sometimes you may not want to feel that way or you may not want to respond to people or you may not want to talk to them about things. And has anyone got someone that they like to talk to when they've got problems and so on? Sophie who do you talk to when you're feeling crook or you're feeling down and you've got problems, over?

SOPHIE: Mostly Mum and some of my friends, over.

TEACHER: Oh well that's good, at least you've got some outlet there. What about you Miranda, who do you talk to if you've got sort of problems or things are all getting you down, over?

MIRANDA: Mostly my Mum, over.

TEACHER: Oh that's good because your Mum's in a very close relationship to you and she's available just about all the time so that's really good. But next year you're going to need to find a few other people as well as Mum if, if in a pressing situation you need to talk to someone. How about you Andy, who do you talk to when you've got problems, over?

After working down the roll asking the same question and responding to each child's answers, the teacher clarified with the children that the objective of this unit of health was "to be aware of and discuss the physical changes which occur to the female during puberty". This objective, she said, was as important

for boys as for girls. After stressing that the topic would be "a learning situation for all of us", she moved on to discuss some of the physical changes that accompany puberty.

TEACHER: Okay you might have noticed your younger brothers or sisters or friends or cousins that are about 2 or 3, they're really quite plump and chubby most of the time and they have, seem to have a big head on their bodies and they're all rounded, but when they start to get to the age of about pre-primary, say 4, 5, 6, then their legs and arms start to grow a big longer and their head changes shape as well. Has anyone here sort of got relations or friends that they've noticed a change in them recently, over?

MIRANDA: Miranda, over.

TEACHER: Go ahead Miranda, I thought you might have one, over.

MIRANDA: Well we've got two younger cousins and like they're a bit plump around the cheeks and everything, over.

TEACHER: Yeah that's right. Younger ones are really a lot more a lot plumper and I'm noticing it particularly with (her own son) who's just going into pre-primary. He's five and he's started to grow, his legs and arms have started to grow a lot longer and his head shape's changing now from being a round chubby little face into the face that it will be when he gets a lot older, it's got narrower and longer than it was then. Okay, when you have a look at the pictures there you can see that the baby who's sitting down there has got a round face and he's fairly plump. Then the next one the toddler's walking around, he's still fairly plump and the girl as she's gotten bigger she's sort of growing more into her head size and she's more, I suppose you'd say she suits the size, she's sort of more well balanced, the shape of her. Okay, then the boy, he's sort of grown into himself a bit too. Who's found that their legs and arms have grown a lot in the recent times and they're feeling a bit gangly now over?

TEACHER: (*Many voices*) Well lots of you, so you're all at the stage of (inaudible) now where you're starting to grow a bit taller, your arms and legs seem to get longer and you can't run as fast.

In the next section of the lesson, the teacher moved on to consider changes in children's abilities:

TEACHER: Alright, let's have a look at the next one down the page. There you can see the changes of things we do as you get older. When you're a small baby you haven't got much control over your body, you have to wear nappies and so on. When you're really tired Mum puts you to bed because you don't know when it's time to go to sleep and often babies cry, but they don't know what's wrong with them and their parents don't either but it could be that they're either thirsty or they're hungry or they're tired or they're sick, and you've got to go through all those things to find out which one is going to make them feel better. Whereas when you get to your age now, at least most of the time, you know what's wrong with you - if you've got a headache, or if you're hungry or if you're tired or if you've got a splinter in your foot you can tell Mum. So you're developing in your language, you're developing in those abilities. What's something that you could do at five or which you couldn't do at five which you can do now? Trish, over?

TRISH: I can read now, and if I have got a splinter in my hand or foot I can normally get it out, over.

TEACHER: Okay so you're much more able to doctor yourself and yes, you've got other skills, mental skills as well like reading, which you didn't have then. How about you Miranda, what can you do now that you couldn't do when you were say five or six, over?

MIRANDA: I can help myself a lot more, I can get myself dressed and everything, over.

TEACHER: Yes, that's a good one too and a lot of you can probably drive a car now or ride a motor bike which you may not have been able to do at five or six, or ride a bike and so on. Okay, so there are physical changes that happen, a change in the things that you can do. You've all grown tall so you can probably all reach the lolly jar or the biscuit jar in the top of the cupboard where Mum puts it too.

MIRANDA: (*Laughs in recognition*)

In the final stage of the lesson, the teacher turned to consider how external events and situations may change the way children feel as they grow up:

TEACHER: There are some changes in life which are caused by situations or events which may change how you think, feel (inaudible) and they're external to your own growth. For example, the death of a person or a pet. and I know Trish you've had a couple of those this year, you've lost your horse and you've also lost your grandfather. So what I'm going to ask now is if each of you can let us know of something that's happened to you that has affected the way you looked at things recently, or just in the recent past, over?

MIRANDA: Miranda, over.

TEACHER: Go ahead Miranda, over.

MIRANDA: Well I won an award for photography and that, I gained confidence with my photography and everything, over.

TEACHER: Yeah that's right, if you're given an award for something like that it means that you thought you were pretty good at it and now this just reinforces that belief that you are pretty good at it because you've received an award and you're very good at it for your age or for your grouping and so you'll keep going and have another go. That's really exciting to have that sort of a recognition of your skills. Anyone else over? Go ahead please Trish, over.

After working her way down the roll again, asking children to identify external events that had influenced they way they felt, the teacher moved to close the lesson. She reminded children that they should finish the table on page 12 of the set, asked them to write a note in the follow-up section of their diaries to remind themselves about completing the table, and reminded them about the materials they would need for tomorrow's language lesson. She then said goodbye, working her way down the roll for the final time:

TEACHER: Alright that's all from me this morning and I'll say goodbye and I hope you have a terrific day and I'll look forward to catch up with you tomorrow at 10:30 and don't forget to bring your dictionaries. Right, so I'll say goodbye to you Rex, over.

REX: Goodbye Mrs Connelly, over.

TEACHER: Goodbye to you Trish and I hope you have a great day Trish, over.

TRISH: Goodbye Mrs Connelly and everybody, have a nice day, over.

TEACHER: And goodbye to you Andy, over.

ANDY:	Goodbye Mrs Connelly and everyone else, have a nice day, over.
TEACHER:	Thank you Andy. Goodbye to you Miranda and Mr Louden, over.
MIRANDA:	Good morning Mrs Connelly and everybody else, over.
TEACHER:	And good morning to you Sophie, over.
SOPHIE:	Good morning Mrs Connelly and everyone else and I hope you have a very nice day, over.
TEACHER:	Thanks very much Sophie, over and out.

One of the advantages of well written distance education materials is that they scaffold learning tasks very carefully, perhaps more carefully than many teachers can manage to achieve day after day in the hurly-burly of a class of thirty children. The section of the Puberty text covered in this lesson carefully illustrated a series of physical changes and the emotional consequences for children. This scaffold was brought to life by the school of the air teacher as she moved down the roll, asking each child a question about each aspect of change.

There are several important ways in which this air lesson added value to the text which other distance education students would have been working through on their own and in silence. One aspect of the teacher's added value was that she explicitly stated the objective of the lesson. This is a useful step in regular lessons, but it may be even more important for distance education students whose high levels of motivation to complete their work may undermine their attention to the learning outcomes of the lesson.

As the teacher worked her way through the lesson, she also made good use of her knowledge of the circumstances of the children's lives. When she asked children to identify examples of changes, she already had some changes in mind ("I know ... you've lost your horse and your grandfather"). She also knew about some of the challenges which would be facing children, such as Miranda, who would be boarding away from home next year ("next year you are going to need to find a few other people"). She was experienced in working with children of this age, and able to connect the lesson to common experiences ("you can probably all reach the lolly jar where Mum puts it"). She also had the knack, which comes from experience, of finding a way of talking about the physical changes which the boys and girls share ("Who's ... feeling a bit gangly now?"), rather than focusing on the male and female differences which might come more readily to mind for twelve-year-olds.

In addition to this assistance with the content of the health lesson, the teacher also provided an organisational structure designed to help students and home tutors to complete the lessons. She began the air lesson with a series of reminders about materials needed for coming lessons, and she gave an extra reminder to children who had not read the study guide ("You will need to have watched it for next week's lesson, Miranda"). As she ended the lesson

she instructed children to make a note in the "follow up" section of their diaries about what to do for homework, and she reminded them about the materials needed for tomorrow's language lesson.

Like many others involved in school of the air as home tutors, Mrs Rourke likes to listen to air lessons and has become something of an expert on them. She thought that the health teacher described in the lesson above was "good on the radio". She can be "quite challenging", she said, but "she makes the children feel very comfortable with her". Another important aspect of air lessons from Mrs Rourke's point off view, is that she does not have to do so much of the teaching in subjects which are covered by air lessons. Unlike language and mathematics, where Mrs Rourke plays a leading role, the school of the air teachers do most of the organising for the school of the air subjects such as social studies, science, health and art:

> The teachers go through all that on the air lesson. The kids know what to expect and I know what to expect from the answers, because the teachers have already explained them.

Conclusion

Miranda Rourke is a shy and reserved member of a close family who live and work together on a remote pastoral property. Although the property is isolated, Miranda and her family have good access to library books and magazines to read. Miranda is a keen reader, with a taste for romantic fiction. For the rest of the family, reading is a seasonal activity reserved for summer days when it is too hot to work.

Miranda described "imagination" as the key quality in being a good reader or writer, and identified several differences between the reading and writing strategies required for fictional and informational texts. Her distance education days are organised around her air lesson times and the availability of the computer she and Holly share. She does not work to a strict timetable. She works methodically at all of the tasks presented in her written materials, and particularly likes the opportunity of talking and listening to her friends and teachers during air lessons.

Miranda's mother does not like to play too direct a role in her language lessons because she is not always sure of the correct answers. She prefers to teach spelling lessons and mathematics where the answers can easily be checked. When Mrs Rourke assists Miranda with her writing, she sticks closely to the written instructions provided in the text or in supplementary notes provided by the school. Mrs Rourke finds the demands of two children on distance education very wearing, and would prefer to employ a governess during busy times on the property, so that she could be a "normal mum". Mrs Rourke has some concerns about the value of the written feedback Miranda and Holly receive from the school as it is "three weeks old before the kids see it", but she appreciates the encouragement offered by their teachers. Having been personally responsible for her daughters' primary school education, Mrs

Rourke looks forward with some trepidation to their first year away in a regular school: "the test is when they actually go away to school".

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